DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 784 CS 511 769

TITLE	Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (85th, Miami, Florida, August 5-8, 2002). Media Ethics Division.
PUB DATE	2002-08-00
NOTE	194p.; For other sections of these proceedings, see CS 511 770-787.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC08 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Advertising; *Ethics; Foreign Countries; Genocide; Higher Education; *Journalism Education; *Mass Media Role; Photographs; Research Needs; Sexuality
IDENTIFIERS	Anecdotes; Generation Y; Rwanda

ABSTRACT

The Media Ethics division of the proceedings contains the following 6 papers: "A Masochist's Teapot: Where to Put the Handle in Media Ethics" (Thomas W. Hickey); "Stalker-razzi and Sump-pump Hoses: The Role of the Media in the Death of Princess Diana" (Elizabeth Blanks Hindman); "The Promise and Peril of Anecdotes in News Coverage: An Ethical Analysis" (David A. Craig); "Generation Y's Ethical Judgments of Sexual and Fear Appeals in Print Advertising" (Jeffrey J. Maciejewski); "The Effects of Visuals on Ethical Reasoning: What's a Photograph Worth to Journalists Making Moral Decisions?" (Renita Coleman); and "Rwanda, News Media, and Genocide: Towards a Research Agenda for Reviewing the Ethics and Professional Standards of Journalists Covering Conflict" (Kevin R. Kemper and Michael Jonathan Grinfeld). (RS)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 473 784

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (85th, Miami, FL, August 5-8, 2002): Media Ethics Division.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. McGill

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 511 769

Media
Ethics

A MASOCHIST'S TEAPOT:
Where to Put the Handle in Media Ethics

by

Thomas W. Hickey

2350 Cypress Pond Road # 2204

Palm Harbor, Florida 34683

727-215-3411

thickey2@tampabay.rr.com

University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Burnett Competition

A MASOCHIST'S TEAPOT:
Where to Put the Handle in Media Ethics

ABSTRACT

The task of defining ethics in mass communications can be aided by an interface with religion. The four guiding principles of the Society of Professional Journalists express ethical tension that can be viewed as a conflict between the metaphysical concepts of the *one* and the *many*. The doctrine of the Trinity resolves this conflict by uniting both concepts instead of pitting them as opposites. Following this model, a grid can be developed for plotting ethical journalism.

A MASOCHIST'S TEAPOT:

Where to Put the Handle in Media Ethics

Among the posters currently filling empty advertising panels in airports today is a selection titled The Masochist's Teapot. This otherwise normal teapot has its handle placed directly under its spout on the same side of the teapot. The frustration of pouring tea out of this pot is an apt analogy to the frustration of those seeking ethical reform within journalism. Journalists are whipping themselves over their ethical lapses (Starck, 2001; Smith, 1999: Altschull, 1996), bemoaning a lack of enforcement of ethical codes (Bukro, 2000; Meyers, 2000), concerned about their poor public image (Meyer, 2000; Hallin, 1998), and even proposing revolutionary reforms from within their ranks (Shriver, 1998; Christians et al., 1993). Herbert Altschull's (1996) assessment is very simple: "Journalism is going through a crisis of conscience" (p. 166). This crisis of conscience is the result of an inescapable conflict between the personal and professional responsibilities of a journalist. Janet Malcolm (1990) put it this way:

> Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. (p. 1)

Malcolm's critique is directed against a journalist who would befriend a person in order to get a story and then betray that person in print, but her rebuke echoes throughout the field.

The Current Search for Values in Journalism

This study will start with an acknowledgment that the current state of journalism is very much mired in a debate over ethics. It is also acknowledged that much progress has been made in the last thirty years. Lee Anne Peck (2001) cites an interview with Clifford Christians: "...in the 1970s, an interest in teaching journalism ethics was revived; he speculated one reason was the coverage of the Watergate affair" (p.10). The 1980s saw the inauguration of a scholarly journal (*Journal of Mass Media Ethics*) and a trade magazine (*Media Ethics*), as well as dozens of texts and applied ethics books in the field of mass communications. Articles related to ethics are frequently found on the pages of established trade publications,[1] and journalism schools around the country are incorporating ethics in the academic preparation of journalists.[2] The Society of Professional Journalists wrote a code of ethics in 1973 and re-wrote it in 1995. Clearly, the issue of ethics in journalism is not being ignored (see Christians & Lambeth, 1996). In fact, John Merrill (1997) notes, "Ethics is becoming an increasingly important part of journalism practice and education" (p. 222).

There is, however, something akin to the Masochist's Teapot in all this. Deni Elliott (1988) spotted the problem thirteen years ago in a short article in the nascent *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. Ethical wrestlings voiced within the trade are frequently met with an attitude of "This is the decision I made; you might do something different" (p. 28). She demonstrates that a consistent use of this type of relativistic standard would have left Janet Cooke with her Pulitzer Prize. Despite the nonjudgmental tones expressed within the ranks of journalists, there are operative standards she calls "shared values" (p. 29).

> It would be easy to draw the erroneous conclusion that journalists are relativists—adherents to a philosophical theory that holds that there is no objective standard for judging right and wrong. However, I will argue here that journalists do hold moral standards by which they judge professional behavior. Indeed, without such standards, journalism would not be recognizable as a discreet industry. (p. 28)

For the purposes of this study, Elliott's plea to acknowledge objective standards is another way of saying, "Move the spout away from the handle; ethical journalism cannot be defined from within itself."

The "shared values" Elliot noted in journalism are professional standards that have emerged within a broader cultural context Pojman (2002) calls "the moral process" (p. 71). He says, "…values are rooted in cultural constructs and the foundation for moral principles upon which moral reasoning is based" (pp. 73-74). Black (2001) defines values as "standards of choice through which persons and groups seek meaning and satisfaction and worth" (p. 43). Different social settings may call upon different values, but the process remains the same: values form the base upon which moral reasoning takes place (Pojman, 2002, pp. 61-78). This remains the case even though "Values are seldom consciously considered by the individual" (Black, 2001, p. 43).

This paper will consciously consider values that have emerged in the religious heritage of the West and seek a specific application of these values in the newsroom. Susan Willey (1995) demonstrated that "Religion… serves a unique and unduplicated purpose in the functioning of society, that of promoting values to provide cohesiveness for the common good" (p. 113). Recent writings in the field of journalism demonstrate that it is acceptable today to knock on the door of religious inquiry (Underwood, 2001; Gormly, 1999; Shepard, 1995; Harvill, 1988). While this study will knock upon that door, it will do so in a non-sectarian manner. Religious concepts will be drawn from the Christian faith based upon its undeniable historic impact on the Western world as well as its practical utility in creating social order. The case will be strengthened by the recognition that the influence of the Church in shaping values has never depended upon the faithful adherence of a majority of the populace.

Doug Underwood's (2001) 1998 survey of journalists and editors found that today's newsrooms are steeped in Judeo-Christian values despite several decades of skepticism and outright contempt.

> Still, it is interesting—if not ironic—to find that journalists, with their reputation of being cynical, irreverent, and secular in orientation, appear to draw their ethical inspiration in good part from a religious tradition that, it is believed in certain quarters, they have come to reject. (p. 46)

Underwood's results would seem to confirm what Clifford Christians (1993) has said for a number of years, that values lie beneath all our actions, whether those values are acknowledged or not.

> A justified ethics will acknowledge its value base as it resonates with the character of human experience. The hope for justification lies not in the search for objectivity, but rather in explicitly recognizing every human endeavor as value-laden. (p. 55)

Seeing human endeavor as "value-laden" leads Christians, Ferré, and Fackler to consider the work of a fourth-century Bishop—Augustine of Hippo.[3] This pivotal religious figure is allowed to speak to the present-day search for ethical journalism. Though one does not have to accept his religious convictions, it was nonetheless Augustine's religious perspective that permitted him to construct "a searing critique of the foundations of Western civilization…setting the standard for cultural critique until today" (p. 194). Theologian Donald Shriver (1998), a Media Studies Center fellow, connects religion with values in a recent article. "Religion stands for something of permanent value: meanings that promise to bring coherence out of the muddle of things" (p. 145). The "muddle" is journalism's search for ethics, for a handle on its teapot (see Schulman, 1987). Shriver comments on a book by Jack Fuller (*News Values: Ideas for an Information Age,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), "So, by the end of *News Values* we stand with a journalist on a different sort of frontier: between ethics and religion" (p. 145).

The Impossibility of a Religious Vacuum

The role of religion in shaping the values of society must not be overlooked. The late R. J. Rushdoony (1968)[4] stated quite bluntly that "The life of a society is its creed…" (p. 181). His intriguing work, *The Foundations of Social Order,* documents the effect of the ecumenical creeds of Christendom on the formation of Western values and institutions. He says, "Every social order has an implicit creed, and the creed defines the order and informs it" (p. 185).

An implicit creed was certainly operative in the recent case of the Minnesota reporter who, in pursuit of a story, took a video cassette from an unlocked car. Ethical judgment was rendered by the local chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (see Meyer, 2000). No one cited religion as the basis for censuring the journalist, and yet the judgment was very clearly drawn from the religious commandment, *Thou shalt not steal.* This is Pojman's (2002) moral process of judgment deriving from values (p. 71), or what Rushdoony (1968) calls "religion in action" (p. 181). He explains the connection between religion and moral order in a society:

> Every law order rests on and is the legal codification of a system of morality, and every morality presupposes a religion, some form of "ultimate concern." Most religions are non-theistic, but all religions are basic to one or another system of morality. Moral order is an aspect of religious order. (p. 181)

Without this (unacknowledged) religious foundation in the Minnesota case, it would have been very difficult to condemn the reporter's actions. Nonreligious libertarianism, to be consistent, would have to commend this enterprising reporter for acting autonomously. No one would suggest that John Merrill would approve of the videotape theft, but his moral argumentation in another context leaves little room for criticism of the act.

> I believe in journalistic autonomy, in journalists having the maximum freedom in their decisionmaking. Such freedom should be permitted even if various individuals use this freedom in ways deemed harmful and irresponsible by others. (in Black, 1997, p. 36)

The reporter in question was not only censured by his peers, but also pled guilty to a misdemeanor in a court of law. Both judgments, in effect, move the handle of the journalist's teapot away from its spout. Values are not forged from within the trade; otherwise cars get robbed. Values are imported into the trade from an outside source. Religion addresses the idea of this outside source.

Journalism should perhaps never have tried to operate in a religious vacuum, a point recently made by Eric Gormly (1999).

> Religion is a potent cultural force that affects behavior and imparts moral views and values into the public realm, and as such affects everyone whether a believer or not. (pp. 24-25).

Susan Willey (1995) had earlier noted the media's ineptitude in dealing with the re-emergence of this "potent cultural force," noting that "... whether educators, journalists, or the public like it or not... the voice of religion *is* finding its way into public discourse, but the media do not know quite what to do with it" (pp. 118-119). Willey's conclusions are affirmed by Gormly's research and assertion that

"…to report on culture, the journalist must have some understanding of religion" (p. 28). He argues for the inclusion of religion courses in the academic preparation of journalists.

> Certain programs, in fact, regularly teach religion in media courses, and a few have full graduate programs in the area. What these schools have grasped is the fact that religion is not just another beat. It is simply not possible to segregate religion into a separate, free-standing area—it is too integral to every aspect of American culture, and therefore should be basic and essential to the practice of journalism in this country. (pp. 38-39)

The Enduring Nature of Christian Creeds

G. K. Chesterton, a journalist and author from the turn of the last century, was very much attuned to the enduring legacy of the West's religious heritage: "At least five times… the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died" (1925, pp. 260-61). This endurance that outlasts empires should be acknowledged and utilized in a reporter's perspective as he writes about the world around him. Chesterton's usual wit is evident in his comment directed to those who oppose faith in rational inquiry:

> If our social relations and records retain their continuity, if men really learn to apply reason to the accumulating of facts…it would seem sooner or later even its [*i.e.* faith's] enemies will learn from their incessant and interminable disappointment not to look for any thing so simple as its death. (p. 260)

Chesterton is simply drawing attention to the fact that man's most resilient and lasting institutions are his religious institutions. The press has yet to prove it has such staying power, a fact that ought to introduce an element of humility into the work of a trade that has such tremendous influence to shape the public's perception of the world. Christians *et al.* (1993) observe, "What is most distinctive about the press or any other social institution is its power to define reality" (p. 82). Chief among those "other social institutions" in the West is the Church. Her creedal formulations have defined reality—for better or for worse—for nearly two thousand years. Why modern (or post-modern) man wishes to cast off all ties to the ship that delivered him into the present world is subject of another inquiry. It simply should be noted that seeking to re-establish those ties is a legitimate academic pursuit.

An examination of these old lines of the Faith will find them firmly tied to a single doctrine that has revolutionized man's view of himself in relation to other men: the Trinity. Theologian John Hardon (1975) says that the genius of this doctrine is overlooked today.[6]

> At this critical juncture in the development of the human race, Christianity offers believers a reassessment of the mystery of the Trinity which, for too long, they had taken for granted or had failed to apply to the pressing problems of our day. (p. 63)

Totally apart from any religious dogma, the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity resolved an ancient philosophical riddle: is ultimacy to be perceived as One or as Many? By composing a construct that—for the first time in human history—resolved this riddle by answering, "God is both One and Many" Christianity made a significant contribution to the "development of the human race," as Hardon observed.

The metaphysical idea of the One can be seen in universals, philosophical monism, Plato's forms, ideals, absolutes, and any expression of unity. Institutions such as government, marriage, or law express the One, and foster values such as justice, order, and structure. The idea of the Many can be seen in particulars, philosophical pluralism, Aristotle's matter, objects, the concrete, and any expression of individuality. The Many is expressed in personal identity, happiness, or diversity, and engenders values such as mercy, tolerance, and liberty. In another work by R. J. Rushdoony (1978), this fundamental tension of the One and the Many is addressed at length:

> The one and the many is perhaps the basic question of philosophy. Is unity or plurality, the one or the many, the basic fact of life, the ultimate truth about being? If unity is the reality, and the basic nature of reality, then oneness and unity must gain priority over individualism, particulars, or the many. If the many, or plurality, best describes ultimate reality, then the unit cannot gain priority over the many; then state, church, or society are subordinate to the will of the citizen, the believer, and of man in particular. If the one is ultimate, then individuals are sacrificed to the group. If the many be ultimate, then unity is sacrificed to the will of many, and anarchy prevails. (p. 2n)[7]

The historic setting surrounding the development of the doctrine of the Trinity was filled with the tension of the One and the Many. Earlier Greek philosophers had identified the issue as a fundamental metaphysical concept. The Hebrew Scriptures had insisted that God was one, and yet referred to Him in the plural. Roman imperial power skewed on the side of the *one* by deifying Caesar and making the State absolute ruler over all. Fiercely independent tribes on the fringes of the Empire were successfully challenging the supremacy of the Roman State with a social order firmly in favor of the *many*. And at the root of it all was the Apostolic affirmation Christ was God in human flesh, one with the Father and yet distinct from Him.

As the Church sought to define her doctrine, she was well aware of this fundamental tension. Was God one or many? Is political power to be vested in Caesar of Rome—the *one*—or in democracy of Greece—the *many*? Earlier, Vedic religious thought had defined God on the side of the *many*, and later Islam would emerge with a firm concept of God as strictly *one*. Both cultures retain—to this day—the imprint of these fundamental conceptions of ultimacy. As the Church convened her early ecumenical councils, she understood that her task was not merely an academic or theological dispute. Culture would emerge from what this new religion—Christianity—would define in her creeds. With Rome crumbling, the Church looked far into the future and anticipated a long and abiding presence on the earth. (It should be noted that the current religious fervor to exit this earth via an imminent *rapture* is an idea born in the 19th century.) Central to the Church's ability to shape the future was how she worded her creeds. Most important of all was how she perceived her God, as Hardon (1975) points out:

> As a Christian today reviews the history of the Church in the first eight hundred years, the most striking feature of the seven general councils held during that period…is their concern to safeguard the reality of the triune God. (p. 53)

The Fundamental Tension: *the One and the Many*

William James (1955) recognized the centrality of this issue, noting, "To believe in the one or in the many, that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences" (p. 90). This study will demonstrate in the field of media ethics that James was correct, and there are indeed a large "number of consequences" resulting from a tension between the One and the Many. However, James sees a polarity in which it is necessary to affirm either the One or the Many. The early ecumenical councils of Christianity eliminated that polarization. By affirming both as equally ultimate, they turned the inherent tension of the One and the Many into a constructive force. Pope John Paul II summarized this revolutionary thought in relational terms: "God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family…" (in Hahn, 1999, pp. 148-149).

The doctrine of the Trinity was not posited in one all-night session spent wrangling over words. It was carefully forged on a negative anvil over many centuries. As challenges emerged questioning the deity of Christ or the unity of God, the Church met to draw boundaries (see Hardon, 1975, p. 64ff). Thus the doctrine of the Trinity has never been precisely defined, and may never be. What did emerge were various statements that said in effect, "We cannot exactly say what the Trinity is, but we can clearly define what it is not."

This negative definition provided surprising resilience for a Christian faith to be ever growing. Ethical journalism may need to be defined negatively also. In other words, instead of seeking a precise definition of ethical behavior, draw some limits that clearly define unethical behavior and then leave the room between for an ever-vexing ethical tension. What will emerge is surprisingly the same fundamental tension that vexed the early Church. The great heritage of the Western world that issued from these creedal formulations is a culture that places equal value on the individual and the institutions of society, and upholds an equal appreciation of justice and mercy.

The One and the Many in Journalism

Buzz Merritt (1995) argues that journalism in America is already defined negatively, or as he puts it, "born in a defensive crouch" (p. 13). The First Amendment, rather than granting specific rights to the press, simply guarantees no interference. In an unconscious allusion to the only other institution mentioned in the First Amendment, Merritt notes, "The First Amendment thus became a glowing crucifix thrust at arm's length against any would-be devil's approach" (p. 14). Fundamental to this freedom is the tension of the One and the Many:

> The First Amendment was written to insure that individual Americans' rights were specific and absolute in the face of the establishment of a central government. (p. 14)

In this case, the Many is represented by "individual Americans' rights" and the One by "a central government."

The tension between the One and the Many is pervasive. American currency is stamped with recognition that this tension created our democratic republic: *E pluribus unum.* Clifford Christians (1993) uses this same language to argue for his view of communitarian journalism; "Political *unum* and cultural *pluribus* are not mutually exclusive, at least not in principle" (p. 100). He is certainly aware of this tension, noting that "…universalism contradicts individualism at its root" (in Black, 1997, p. 21).

It would seem that journalism is forever doomed to pour tea from the masochist's teapot. Can the tension be resolved, or at least managed to some useful end? Christians *et al.* (1993) seem to think so: "Rather than universalism versus communitarianism, they need to feed from one another" (pp. 21-22). This is precisely what Elliott (1988) had concluded in her article cited earlier.

> Absolutist theories provide formulae to help journalists figure out what it means to act out of a sense of professional duty, or for the benefit of society, and how to respect, with equity, the rights of all individuals involved. (p. 31)

The "professional duty…for the benefit of society" is an expression of the One—collective, communitarian journalism—while the "rights of all individuals" give voice to the Many—individualistic, Enlightenment, libertarian journalism. The key point to notice here is that these ethicists are seeking the same resolution that is codified in the doctrine of the Trinity—the integrity of *both* the One and the Many must be maintained and somehow harmonized. Otherwise, as Jay Black (2002) observed, journalism ethics will remained polarized and "two-valued."[8]

Once again, a dip into the well of Christian theology may help. The doctrine of the Trinity is remarkable for the fact that it harmonized the tension without violating the integrity of either the One or the Many. The Christian God is *both* One and Many. What this means is that the Church did not slip into imbalance in three different areas:

1. The Church did not simply ignore the tension or minimize its importance.
2. The Church did not side in favor of one pole over against the other.
3. The Church did not seek a compromise that stripped either side of its essence.

If ethical debate in the field of journalism can avoid the same imbalances, more progress may be made toward delimiting and enforcing ethical journalism. Handles and spouts are not at war with one another on a teapot; they simply need to be properly placed.

A Proposed Model for Defining Ethical Journalism

At the heart of the ethical debate within journalism are two tensions that both can be categorized as an expression of tension of the One and the Many. The guiding principles of the current code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists (1996) express this tension on two different fronts. This code expects journalists to "Seek truth and report it," but also to "minimize harm." They are also held to the standard to "Act independently" and yet "Be accountable.". "Seeking the truth" is an expression of the dominance of the One—objective reality in no relation to individual perception; "reporting it" is also an expression of the One—a unified effort to speak to a group as a social unit. "Minimizing harm" is an expression of the Many—individuals taking precedence over any facts to be reported about them.

Finding the One and the Many is a little more difficult in the remaining two injunctions to "act independently" while "remaining accountable." Independent action is not solitary action; many individuals can all act independently. The One is more properly an expression of a group or a norm to which an individual is accountable. As Rushdoony (1978) noted above, "If the one is ultimate, then individuals are sacrificed to the group" (p. 2n). To "act independently" is thus to express the metaphysical Many while to "be accountable" is to acknowledge the necessity of the One.

If we can leave the spout of our teapot in the world of journalistic endeavor but move the handle to the side of a metaphysical mystery that is (consciously or unconsciously) part of our cultural legacy, we ought to have a useful model for doing journalism ethically. Jay Black (1996) does exactly that (though certainly unconsciously) in his analysis of the four guiding principles of the SPJ (*Report*,1996; see also Black, 1995). The point is not to assert that Black is a closet Trinitarian (he is not), but that the process he engages is as old as the ecumenical creeds and, at its root, the very same philosophical dilemma. His process is to avoid the three imbalances the Church avoided in dealing with the tension between the one and the many.

The first imbalance is avoided when Black notices the natural pairing of these four guiding principles into an ethical tension in which minimizing harm checks the reporting of truth while being accountable puts limits on acting independently. He then advises against the tendency to square these principles off as mutually antagonistic (p. 25) in the manner depicted in figure 1 below. The reason this kind of pairing is unproductive is because resolution in this model can only come by being pulled into one of the other two imbalances—either favoring one side over the other, or compromising right in the middle "with the yellow stripe in the road and the dead horned toads" as one Texas preacher put it. Aristotle's Golden Mean was not the same as this yellow stripe; he sought balance, not compromise (see Dickson, 1988). Cunningham (1999) clarifies the common misconception of Aristotle's virtue ethics as some kind of compromise, noting that "The extremes are measured by the right thing to do, not the other way around" (p. 8).

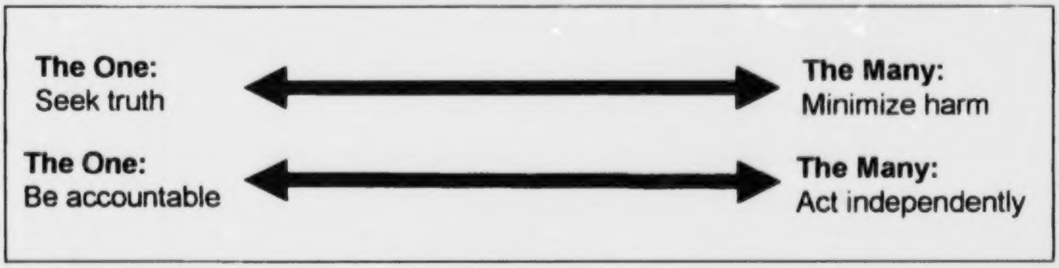

Figure 1
Placing guiding principles in opposition to each other leaves only three ways to resolve the tension: 1) ignore it, 2) favor one side over the other, or 3) compromise in the middle.

Black (1996), with Aristotle, is looking for "the right thing to do," and thus proposed a way to keep the tension and yet harmonize their different ethical directions. His grids are reproduced in figure 2. Bad journalism is in the lower left boxes of his grid, better in the two adjacent boxes, while good journalism is the direction of the arrow to the upper right box (p. 25). His arrow is, in effect, Aristotle's Golden Mean (*i.e.* virtue) applied to journalism.[9]

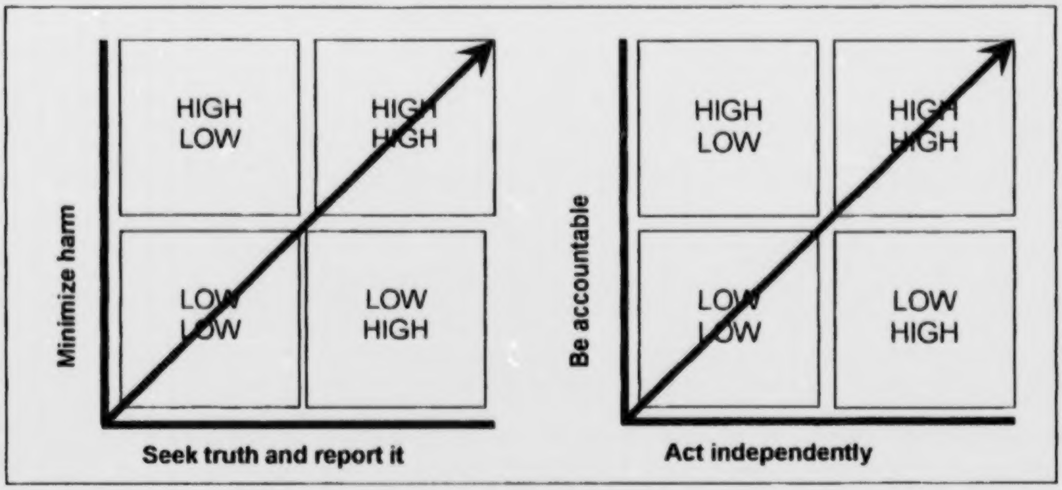

Figure 2
Jay Black's grids for defining ethical journalism using the four guiding principles of the SPJ Code of Ethics.

Black's ethical grids seem to beg for a completion, however. Just as the concept of the Trinity had to take its place in the larger context of all kinds of theism, so these ideal expectations must be placed in a context that includes both ethical and unethical journalism. Sandra Dickson (1988) cites the search for opposites as the Aristotelian method for finding the Golden Mean: "First of all, Aristotle contended that to find the intermediate, one must first depart from the action which is most contrary" (p. 36). A larger field for ethical evaluation can be obtained by defining actual opposites for both the One and the Many.

The needed opposites suggest themselves when the One and the Many are tied to specific actions. For example, the opposite of "seek truth and report it" would be "ignore truth and hide it." The opposite of "minimize harm" is obviously "maximize harm." "Act independently" is countered by "act according to the wishes of others" or "lose your moral autonomy," as in the case of a conflict of interest. "Be accountable" is opposed by "avoid or eliminate accountability." The four guiding principles of the SPJ can thus be placed on two grids as illustrated in figure 3.

With the grids thus defined, it becomes evident that very little journalism is purely unethical, for that would describe a person who actually seeks to do harm while ignoring truth, or one who relies totally on hearsay and refuses any accountability. Such behavior could actually be criminal, and despite the poor public image, very few journalists end up in jail. The wings of the new grid (bottom right and upper left) leave room for behavior that might be culpable in a professional sense and out of the range of the best ethical standards for journalism. "Unwise" is used in the first grid to describe behavior that seeks and reports truth, but may do a great deal of unnecessary harm. "Inadequate" describes work that seeks to minimize harm, but fails to pursue truth or may even cover it up. On the second grid, "unwise" fits the journalist who would act independently but avoid accountability, while "inadequate" describes one who remains accountable with no independent action. In order to have the quadrants labeled similarly, the One becomes the horizontal axis in the second grid, and the many is the vertical. Shading has replaced Black's arrow—the darker the field, the more ethical the behavior.

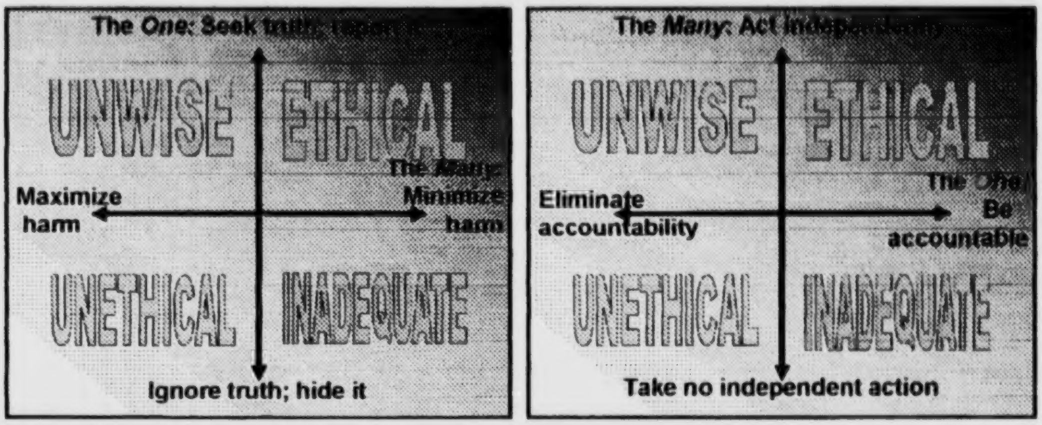
The One: Seek truth; report it
UNWISE
ETHICAL
The Many: Minimize harm
Maximize harm
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Ignore truth; hide it
The Many: Act independently
UNWISE
ETHICAL
The One: Be accountable
Eliminate accountability
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Take no independent action

Figure 3
Two grids based on the four guiding principles of the SPJ.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Case Studies

It is hoped that these grids can place the handle on the teapot, so to speak, in making ethical journalistic decisions. The value of the grids will be tested by plotting several known cases on them. This paper will assume a general familiarity with case studies already published in the field of journalism, and thus discussion will be kept to a minimum. The method used for each case is outlined below.

First Grid: the Situation

The objective of the first grid is to sketch out a field that will allow the journalist to identify the basic ethical tensions of the situation, apart from any reporting of it.

1. **Find the one and the many, if possible.** Try to think of the problem or situation in the broadest terms possible. See if beneath the specifics of the case, there is some expression of the *one and the many*. The *one* may manifest itself as the power of government, the rule of law, national security, public institutions, the community, an accepted standard, duty—in short, universals. It is mainly the cry for justice. The *many* would be seen in liberty, freedom, individuality, people as people—in short, particularities. It is mainly the cry for mercy. Not every situation can be defined by this tension, and there is no benefit to be derived from an artificial imposition of values that are not inherent in the case. But if the *one and the many* can be seen in the case, it may be helpful to proceed.
2. **Define the opposites.** Once the two poles of the *one and the many* have been defined, define their opposites. Whatever the specific expression of the *one* is (*i.e.*, national security), realize that the *many* (*i.e.*, the public's right to know) is not the opposite. Try to identify what the actual opposites are. When the actual opposites are defined, then the whole problem can be placed on a grid. In most cases, the

opposites will be hypothetical or even ridiculous actions, but they need to be stated to give the whole situation perspective.

3. **Stay in the upper right quadrant.** If the situation has been properly defined, the values that are going to best conform to Western culture and heritage will in the upper right quadrant. This will most probably represent society's moral bias. The reporter may or may not agree, and depending on the situation, she may decide that her reporting should either affirm these values or challenge them. At least a handle has been placed on the situation.

Second & Third Grids: the Reporting

4. **Use the four guiding principles.** The ethics of the situation are separate from the ethics of the reporting. The two grids developed from the SPJ's guiding principles can serve as a useful tool to define—in theory—what the journalism at its best should seek to accomplish. As an additional value, the journalist can avoid being torn by competing loyalties of a false dichotomy. The underlying ethical tension should be harnessed to produce ever-better journalism. The goal is to avoid the other three quadrants and have the story fall as high as possible in the upper right portion of the grid.

Sage Volkman

The two newspapers in Albuquerque divided over whether to show pictures of the badly-burned 5-year-old Sage Volkman. At first, neither paper wanted to sensationalize the family's personal tragedy; they showed nothing of the horrible disfigurement that was now Sage's face and body. Both the larger morning *Journal* and the evening *Tribune* helped to raise public awareness of the Sage Volkman Fund to pay for medical expenses and treatment. Eventually, the *Tribune* ran a special 12-page pictorial essay that documented Sage's life before the accident and showed tasteful, yet disturbing shots of Sage's disfigurement. The special tabloid included a letter from the editor stating, "When you come upon Sage unexpectedly in a store or restaurant, your first reaction may be one of sadness. But if you do run into her, we hope you will see her as we do—as a brave little girl" (in Christians, 1993, p. 50). The situation grid is presented in figure 4. The *many* cries out in this case as compassion and concern for Sage and her family; the *one* is the public's need to know and learn that accidents can bring dire consequences. These are not opposites. The opposites would be to keep the public unaware and to insensitively publish the family's pain. The high moral ground is thus marked out.

Both papers were seeking truth and reporting it. Both papers were seeking to minimize harm. Thus both are operating in the upper right quadrant of ethical journalism as depicted in figure 10. The *Tribune* goes a little farther in seeking the truth without creating any additional harm. In fact, it can be argued that in the long term, the *Tribune* minimized harm in Sage's future by preparing the public for what it would see. On the second set of guiding principles, depicted in figure 11, the *Tribune* again is perhaps more commendable because it sought accountability to the entire community while the *Journal* remained accountable only to its own standards. This point may be argued, but this paper will place ✓ them on the grids as depicted in figures 10 and ~~12~~. 11

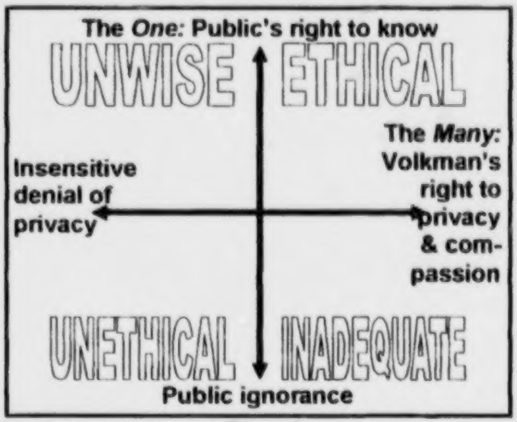
The *One:* Public's right to know
UNWISE
ETHICAL
The *Many:* Volkman's right to privacy & compassion
Insensitive denial of privacy
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Public ignorance

Figure 3
Situation grid for Sage Volkman.

Food Lion vs. ABC

The situation that presented itself to ABC in the Food Lion case is graphed in figure 5. The unhealthy practices of Food Lion put people at risk; the individuals in the community are thus the *many*. Again, it is the public's right to know that supplies the *one* for this situation. The opposite to the cry of the *many* would be no concern for others' health. The opposite of the *one* again is public ignorance.

The ethical angst of this case revolves around using deception (*i.e.* untruth) to "seek truth and report it." For this reason, though good was done--the public was warned and Food Lion cleaned up its act—many argue that ABC did not minimize harm to the extent it might have (Smith, 1999, p. 221-23). Perhaps the deception did harm to the fabric of society and to the profession of journalism. For this reason, it will be placed in figure 10 as high in seeking truth but low in minimizing harm, though well within the bounds of ethical journalism. In the grid in figure 11, the fact that ABC could be sued, and was, indicates that accountability was lacking, at least in a legal sense. ABC's accountability to the public's right to know, however, keeps it above the line of ethical behavior.

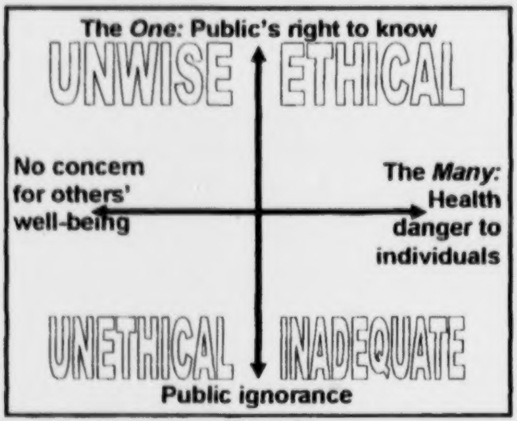
The *One:* Public's right to know
UNWISE
ETHICAL
No concern for others' well-being
The *Many:* Health danger to individuals
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Public ignorance

Figure 5
Situation grid for Food Lion vs. ABC

Jim Gray's interview of Pete Rose

Jim Gray interviewed Pete Rose shortly after he had been introduced as part of an All-Century Team before a sellout crowd during the 1999 World Series. Gray badgered Rose, asking him to admit to, and apologize for, his alleged gambling misdeeds that have kept him banned from the Baseball Hall of Fame. The interview was so out of line that calls from around the country flooded NBC's switchboards for two hours. Other players boycotted Gray, and NBC was forced to replace him for the remainder of the series, even though it continued to defend his handling of the interview (Ben Scott in Patterson & Wilkins, 2002, p. 275-76). The ethics of the situation depend on what is identified as the *one*. Two options are presented in figures 6a and 6b. The *one* in figure 6a is the institution of baseball; the *many* is the individual contribution of Pete Rose. The opposites would then be no concern for the good of the institution and no concern for Pete Rose as a person. In 6b, the *one* may be seen as the rule against gambling on one's own sport. At its root, this would be the moral/religious standard of *Thou shalt not steal.* In this case, the *many* remains the individual case of Pete Rose—as a person and not simply a rule-breaker. The opposite for the *one* in 6b is approval of theft or dishonesty.

In both 6a and 6b, a legitimate concern to seek the truth and report it was cancelled by doing it at the wrong time and place. It was a night to honor Rose, not confront him on a very painful subject. In the case of 6a, it is hard to call it unethical journalism, but it certainly is very low on "minimizing harm." In the case of 6b, the moral crusade to ferret out the truth places Gray's interview high on the grid, but the choice to do it on live national television did harm to all concerned. Even if Gray had elicited a confession from Rose, it is doubtful what good would have been accomplished. Thus both 6a and 6b stay just within the bounds of ethical, but bad, journalism on the grid in figure 10. In figure 11, Gray has to be placed high in "acting independently" for both 6a and 6b, but it is not exactly clear where his accountability was directed. He embarrassed his employer (even though it stood by him), and he angered the public in both 6a and 6b. He hurt the sport of baseball in the case of 6a, and he foolishly tried to enforce a moral judgment already rendered (and forgiven in the eyes of many). Thus, on figure 11, he falls out of the ethical quadrant into the "Unwise" category for both 6a and 6b.

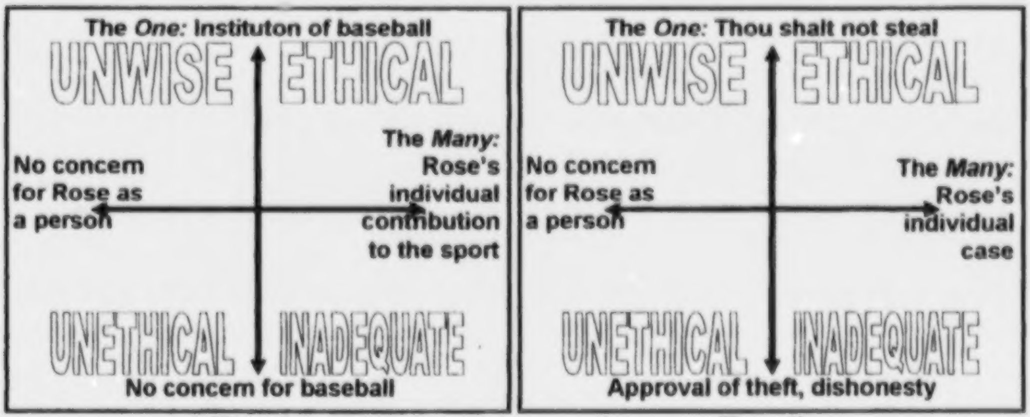
The *One:* Instituton of baseball
UNWISE
ETHICAL
No concem for Rose as a person
The *Many:* Rose's individual contribution to the sport
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
No concem for baseball
The *One:* Thou shalt not steal
UNWISE
ETHICAL
No concem for Rose as a person
The *Many:* Rose's individual case
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Approval of theft, dishonesty

Figure 6a *Figure 6b*

Situation grid for Jim Gray's interview of Pete Rose

Richard Jewell

The situation grid for the Richard Jewell case would have due process of law as the *one* while the safety of individuals would be the *many*. Their opposites are identified in figure 7 as disregard for law and exposing individuals to harm.

Greg Lisby (in Patterson & Wilkins, p. 141-145) titles this case "Competition, Deadlines, and the Mistreatment of Richard Jewell," an apt summary of how not to do journalism—or police investigation for that matter. The only thing that keeps this case out of the bottom left quadrant in figure 10 is the fact that no one was actually trying to do harm to Jewell; in fact, they were trying to protect the public from a perceived menace. But it does go in the "Inadequate" quadrant on this grid. However, on the grid in figure 11, it falls into the bottom left. Reporters, acting on tips from the FBI, did not act independently in confirming all the facts before running stories. (It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the ethics of law enforcement bodies in this case.) The media furthered their lack of independence by demonstrating a "bandwagon" mentality and reporting rumors as news. Accountability went out the window with far too much being disclosed about Jewell than any sense of propriety should allow. Jewell was named in the media as a suspect before he was charged. Not only was Jewell's reputation harmed, but journalism gave itself a black eye in its handling of this case.

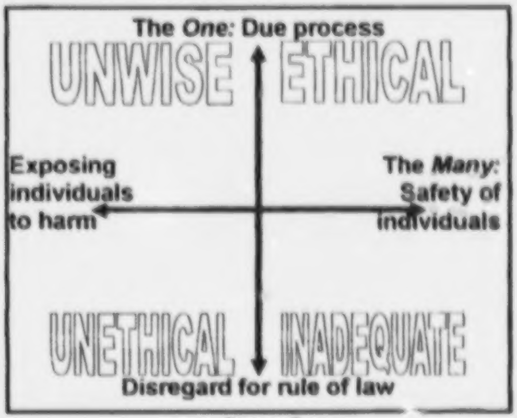
The One: Due process
UNWISE
ETHICAL
Exposing individuals to harm
The Many: Safety of individuals
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Disregard for rule of law

Figure 7
Situation grid for the Richard Jewell case

The Los Angles Times and the Staples Affair

The situation in the Staples affair is a simple conflict of interest, but with a twist. The twist is that the conflict stood to benefit corporate profits rather than individual gain. The independence of the press was threatened. But it was threatened by an opportunity to increase its own profitability. The *Times* represents both the *one* and the *many* in this case. The role of any newspaper is to serve as watchdog for the *many*. However, a newspaper is also a corporate entity and as such becomes an expression of the *one*. The profitability of the *one* compromised the ability of the individual reporters to serve as the voice of the *many*. But these are not the opposites; profitability need not war against independence. It is better to see unprofitability as the direct opposite of the *one*, and loss of independence as the opposite of the *many*, as depicted in figure 8.

When over 300 reporters and editors sign a petition demanding an apology and thorough review of the actions of their publisher, an ethical line has been crossed somewhere. Kathryn Downing admitted that she failed to comprehend the ethics of her secret deal between the paper and the Staples Center. It was quite clearly a conflict of interest and a violation of the principle of journalistic independence. A business partnership with an enterprise featured in a special section of the paper brings the credibility of the *Times* into question on anything written about the Staples Center, and it raises questions in the public's mind regarding any other secret deals they don't know about (Patterson & Wilkins, p. 191-193). This action falls into the quadrant of unethical behavior on in figure 10 because it hid the truth and maximized harm. Downing's intent was to enrich the paper and benefit the new center, and therefore she could hardly be accused of planning to "maximize harm." Nevertheless, the harm done to both the journalists and the public put it over the line into "unethical behavior." On figure 11's grid, Downing certainly acted independently, but she also sought to eliminate accountability. Therefore, her action falls into the "unwise" quadrant on that grid.

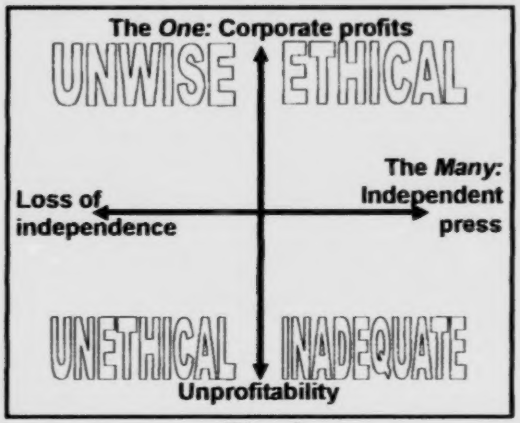

Figure 8
Situation grid for the Staples Affair

Tom Lyden's stolen videotape

Every profession longs for freedom. However, when others' freedom is compromised, lines have to be drawn. Tom Lyden's professional freedom to pursue his job is the cry of the ***many*** in this case. And once again, it is the law that is the expression of the ***one.*** Opposites would be the denial of freedom and lawlessness, as seen in figure 9.

Tom Lyden took a videotape from an unlocked car in pursuit of a story and defended it as "aggressive reporting." The Minnesota chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists issued a statement condemning the act as unprofessional, even thought Lyden was not a member of the organization. Lyden pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge and apologized to his viewers (Meyer, p. 47). There are two stories to plot in this case. First, the theft represented an attempt to seek the truth and report it, but it also maximized harm by breaking a law intended to protect us all. It falls in the "unwise" quadrant of figure 10. It also falls in that quarter in figure 11; he acted independently, but he lost sight of accountability. On the other hand, the SPJ chapter exercised its First Amendment rights and published its own story about the reporter's methods, seeking the truth and reporting it. This helped to restore public confidence and provoked the apology, minimizing the harm done by Lyden. This action deserves a place in the highest quarter of figure 10. The fact that Lyden was not a member of the SPJ only strengthened the case for the SPJ chapter, for it acted independently and sought accountability to the public at large. Once again, it goes in the highest quarter of figure 11. Had the infraction been done by an SPJ member, it is hoped that the action would have been the same.

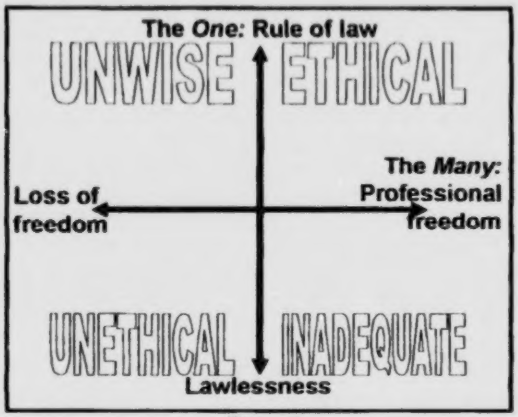
The *One*: Rule of law
UNWISE
ETHICAL
Loss of freedom
The *Many*: Professional freedom
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Lawlessness

Figure 9
Situation grid for the stolen videotape

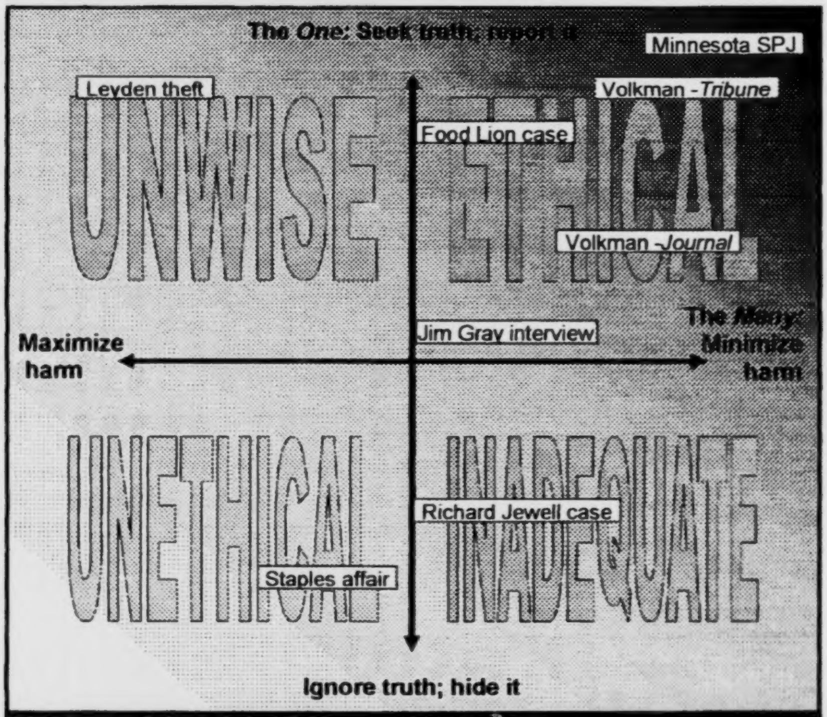
The *One*: Seek truth; report it
Minnesota SPJ
Leyden theft
Volkman - *Tribune*
UNWISE
ETHICAL
Food Lion case
Volkman -*Journal*
Jim Gray interview
Maximize harm
The *Many*: Minimize harm
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Richard Jewell case
Staples affair
Ignore truth; hide it

Figure 10

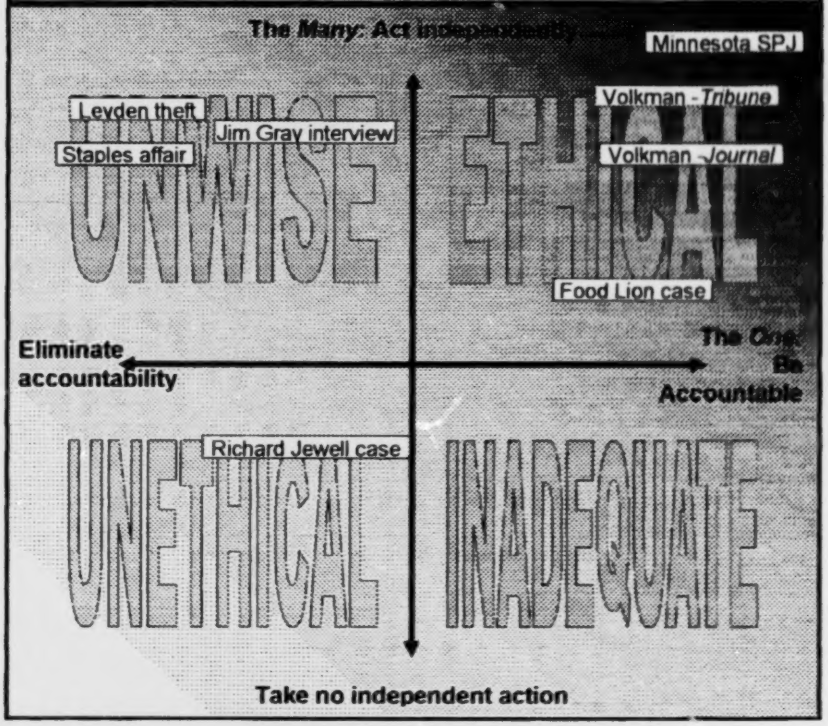
The *Many*: Act independently
Minnesota SPJ
Leyden theft
Volkman - *Tribune*
Jim Gray interview
Staples affair
Volkman -*Journal*
UNWISE
ETHICAL
Food Lion case
Eliminate accountability
The *One*: Be Accountable
Richard Jewell case
UNETHICAL
INADEQUATE
Take no independent action

Figure 11

Case studies plotted against the four guiding principles of the SPJ

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Conclusion: *Have we found a handle?*

Probably the most striking feature of these grids is a picture of how very little mainstream journalism can properly be called unethical. We have moved the handle on the teapot. Unless the journalist really is a masochist, this should be good news. The crisis of conscience among journalists has been relieved of false dichotomies by seeking real opposites to the four guiding principles of journalism found in the SPJ code of ethics. The moral terrain of the journalist has been defined as staying within the tension between the *one* and the *many*. By avoiding the extreme of either end of this tension, and by avoiding a compromise of the integrity of either end, good journalism has been defined.

If this model proves useful, it will be because it mirrors a fundamental philosophical issue present in all of life—the question of perceived ultimacy in a tension between the *one* and the *many*. A religious construct emerged long ago that addressed this philosophical tension and resolved it in an open-ended fashion. The doctrine of the Trinity essentially says that God is *both* one and many, even if this mystery can never be fully expressed. This construct contributed to the development of a value system in which individuals are as important as institutions, and institutions as important as individuals. The press arose in the West as an institution giving voice to the common man (the *many*) and serving as watchdog against the power of the state (the *one*). Ethical journalism may thus be defined as an attempt to harmonize both the voice of the *one* with the voice of the *many*. This study has constructed a model which demonstrates that most journalism falls within these norms of ethical activity, though frequently leaving room for improvement in questions of judgment (unwise behavior) or competence (inadequate effort).

A further benefit, should this model prove useful, is a demonstration that religion can indeed help the journalist seeking ethical direction. Journalists need to recognize that the public they serve is stamped with an unconscious imprint of moral values drawn from a philosophical and religious construct that is vital and active, not buried in an irrelevant past. Though the model in this study is drawn from the wells of Christian thought, other religions have deep springs of reflection, precept, and wisdom that are worth investigating. It is likely that relatively few Christians grasp the philosophical significance of the doctrine they believe, and equally likely that even coarse skeptics can. Good religion benefits all men, or at least it should. Susan Willey (1995), using terminology akin to the One and the Many; noted that religion "...has the potential to promote the values of inclusiveness, unity within diversity, and the dignity of the human being within the common life" (p. 115).

The model developed seeks to harness the tension present in many ethical dilemmas and use it to produce good journalism. It is possible to stay within a broad range of ethical responses with no conflict of conscience. If the spout of the journalist's teapot is her work, and the handle is her ethics, then the handle has been re-aligned with the values of our cultural heritage. No more frustrating cups of tea from an impossible teapot.

Notes

[1] A search using the keyword "ethics" turned up 250 articles since 1991 in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, 49 since 1997 in the *American Communication Journal*, and 27 since 1992 in *Quill*..

[2] For example, the sponsors of *Media Ethics* magazine include six different American schools and one in Spain.

[3] The respect that Augustine commands to this day cannot pass without notice. Though he could be styled as a philosopher or simply an author, he was most significantly a churchman and a theologian. Thomas Cahill in *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995, New York: Anchor Books) pauses to acknowledge the contribution of Augustine to the development of Western civilization. ". . .[W]ith Augustine human consciousness takes a quantum leap forward. . ."(p. 41)

[4] Dr. Rousas John Rushdoony can only be described an anti-humanist, though perhaps one of the most liberally-educated men of the last century. Thoughtful, thorough, and penetrating, his writings covered a wide range of subjects intended to call Christian civilization back to a biblical base. This bias in all his writings probably prevented him from getting the hearing his scholarship deserved. His writings offend the sensibilities of those who are predisposed to reject absolute standards drawn from the Bible. He passed away last year, leaving behind his personal library of over 30,000 volumes on every conceivable subject. This author has Rushdoony to thank for an optimistic view of human history, though Rushdoony himself preferred to withdraw from the mainstream of a civilization he expected to collapse from moral degeneration.

[6] It is not the intent of this paper to be a lesson in historical theology, Nevertheless, Hardon's comments may be of interest to some:

> Under siege of so much secularism, it is not surprising that some people have not been properly instructed in the meaning of the one true God; they have acquired a "mythology" that only vaguely resembles the theism of Christianity. As they grow in mental maturity, they wish to be rid of this "faith," which they now discover is mainly fancy. There may be a substratum of real belief underneath the fanciful debris. Properly speaking, they are not so much atheists as searchers who are sincerely looking for the God of their fathers.(p. 62)

[7] Some further explanation my be helpful for those attuned to this fundamental question of ultimacy:

> The fact that students can graduate from our universities as philosophy majors without any awareness of the importance or centrality of this question does not make the one and the many any less basic to our thinking. The difference between East and West, and between various aspects of Western history and culture, rests on answers to this problem which, whether consciously or unconsciously, have been made. . . (p. 2)
>
> The *one* refers not to a number but to unity and oneness; in metaphysics, it has usually meant the absolute, the supreme Idea for Plato, the universe for Parmenides, Being as such for Plotinus, and so on. The *one* can be a separate whole, or it can be sum of things in their analytic or synthetic wholeness; that is, it can be a transcendent one, which is the ground of all being, or it can be an immanent one. The *many* refers to the particularity or individuality of things; the universe is full of a multitude of beings; is the truth concerning them inherent in their individuality, or is it in their basic oneness? If it is their individuality, then the *many* are ultimate and the proper source of authority, and we have philosophical Nominalism. If it is their oneness, then the *one* is ultimate, and we have *Realism*. According to Realism, universals, which are term applicable to all the universe and can be called real "second substances," are aspects of the one Idea and exist within it. Egyptian, much Greek, and medieval scholastic thought has been "Realistic." For "Nominalism," abstract or general terms have no real existence and are mere names applied to aspects of reality; reality belongs to particulars, actual physical particulars, so that the truth of being is simply that individual things exist. Truth is not some abstraction concerning particular things but is simply the fact of particularity.(p. 2-3)

[8] Unpublished comment on earlier review of this manuscript.

[9] Sandra Dickson in "The 'Golden Mean' in Journalism," JMME 3(1), correctly identifies Aristotle's ideal as a balance, but unfortunately employs language that suggests compromise. For example: "…moral excellence is found in moderation or somewhere in between these two extremes."(p. 35) "Balance" is intuitively more satisfying than "compromise," for the latter term implies something being given up. If the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity—God as *both* one and many—did nothing else, it firmly established in the Western mind that one can have his cake and eat it too—balance, not compromise. Cunningham's article "Getting It Right: Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' as Theory Deterioration," JMME 14(1), would even avoid the word "balance" as missing Aristotle's point that virtue (*i.e.* the right thing to do) creates the extremes by way of contrast: "Steering between evils we know beforehand is all well and good because, admittedly, that is part of what we do, but that still does not get us to the mother lode of understanding what it means to do the right thing…" (p. 14).

Bibliography

Altschull, J. Herbert. (1996). A Crisis of Conscience: Is Community Journalism the Answer? Journal of Mass Media Ethics 11(3), 166-172.

Black, Jay. (2001). Mass Media Ethics. Unpublished class notes. University of South Florida, St. Petersburg.

Black, Jay (Ed.). (1997). Mixed News, the Public/Civic/Communitarian Journalism Debate. Mahweh, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Black, Jay. (1995, November/December). Minimum standards vs. ideal expectations. Quill, 26-30.

Black, Jay. (1996, November). SPJ National Convention Special Report. Quill, 24-25.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich (1955). Ethics. New York: MacMillan.

Bukro, Casey (2000, December). Society falls short on accountability. Quill, 46-47.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (1995). New York: Image Books.

Chesterton, G. K. (1925). The Everlasting Man. Garden City, NY: Image Books.

Christians, Clifford G., Ferré, John P., & Fackler, P. Mark (1993). Good News, Social Ethics and the Press. New York: Oxford University Press.

Christians, Clifford G. & Lambeth, Edmund B. (1996, July). The Status of Ethics Instruction in Communications Departments. Communication Education, 45, 236-243.

Cunningham, Stanley B. (1999). Getting It Right: Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' as Theory Detrioration. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 14(1), 5-15.

Dickson, Sandra H. (1988). The 'Golden Mean' in Journalism. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 3 (1), 33-37.

Elliott, Deni (1988). All is not relative: Essential Shared Values and the Press. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 3 (1), 28-32.

Galician, Mary-Lou, & Pasternack, Steve (1987). Balancing Good News and Bad News: An Ethical Obligation? Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 2 (2), 82-92.

Gormly, Eric Kevin (1999, Summer). The Study of Religion and the Education of Journalists. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 25-39.

Hallin, Daniel (1998). A Fall from Grace: The professionalism that once sustained journalists has broken down. Media Studies Journal, 12(2), 6 pages.

Hardon, John A. (1975). The Catholic Catechism. New York: Doubleday & Company.

Hahn, Scott. (1999). The Lamb's Supper. New York: Doubleday.

Harvill, Jerry (1988). 'Oikonomia:' The Journalist as a Steward. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 3 (14), 63-76.

Hazlitt, Henry (1964). The Foundations of Morality. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company.

James, William. (1955). Pragmatism. New York: Meridian Books.

Johnson, Michelle (2000). How well do editors know their readers?, Quill, December 2000, p. 56-57.

Knowlton, Steven R. & Parsons, Patrick R. (Eds.). (1994). The Journalist=s Moral Compass, Basic Principles. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Kovach, Bill and Rosenstiel, Tom (2001). Are Watchdogs an Endangered Species? Columbia Journalism Review, May/June 2001, p. 50-53.

Layton, Charles (1999, March). The State of the American Newspaper, What Do Readers Really Want? American Journalism Review, 47-63.

Malcolm, Janet. (1990). The Journalist and the Murderer. New York: Vintage Books.

Merrill, Jack C., & Odell, S. Jack (1983). Philosophy and Journalism. New York: Longman.

Merrill, John C. (1997). Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media. New York: St. martin's Press.

Merrill, John C. (1994). Legacy of Wisdom, Great Thinkers and Journalism. Ames, IA: Iowa State University.

Merritt, Davis. (1995). Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Meyer, Philip (2000, December). Enforcing ethics through exposure. Quill, 47-48.

Meyers, Christopher (2000). Creating an Effective Newspaper Ombudsman Position. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 15(4), 248-256.

Olasky, Marvin (1996). Telling the Truth, How to Revitalize Christian Journalism. Wheaton, Il: Crossways Books.

Patterson, Philip, and Wilkins, Lee (2002), Media Ethics: Issues & Answers. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Peck, Lee Ann (2001, August). Beyond War Stories: Clifford G. Christians= influence on the teaching of media ethics, 1976-1984. Monograph presented to the History Division of the annual Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Pippert, Wesley G. (1989). An Ethics of News. Georgetown University Press.

Pojman, Louis P. (2002). Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Reeb, Richard H. Jr. (1999) Taking Journalism Seriously. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Rushdoony, Rousas John (1978). The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosphy of Order and Ultimacy. Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press.

Rushdoony, Rousas John (1968) . The Foundations of Social Order, Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church. Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books.

Schulman, Robert (1987). Media in a Values Muddle. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 2 (1), 23-29.

Shepard, Alicia (1995, December). The Media Get Religion. American Journalism Review, 19-25.

Shriver, Donald W. Jr. (1998). Meaning from the Muddle. Media Studies Journal, 12(2), 138-47.

Smith, Ron F. (1999). Groping for Ethics in Journalism. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

Society of Professional Journalists. (1996) Code of Ethics.

Starck, Kenneth (2001). What's Right/Wrong with Journalism Ethics Research? Journalism Studies, 2(1), 133-152.

Stepp, Carl Sessions (2000, July/August). User Friendly. American Journalism Review, 23-35.

Underwood, Doug (2001). Secularists or Modern Day Prophets?: Journalists= Ethics and the Judeo-Christian Tradition, Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 16 (1), 33-47.

Waters, Ken (2001). Competing Moral Visions: Ethics and the Stealth Bible. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 16 (1), 48-61.

Willey, S. (1995). A Critical Analysis of Religion News in Culture, the Newsroom, and the Academy. Unpublished master's thesis, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg.

Stalker-razzi and Sump-pump Hoses:

The Role of the Media in the Death of Princess Diana

Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, Ph.D.
Edward R. Murrow School of Communication
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164

Presented to the Media Ethics Division
of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Miami, Florida, August 2002

Stalker-razzi and Sump-pump Hoses:
The Role of the Media in the Death of Princess Diana

Late in the evening of 30 August, 1997, Diana, Princess of Wales, and her new boyfriend, Dodi Fayed, left a Paris hotel. As their car drove through the Paris streets it was chased by about six photographers on motorcycles. Driver Henri Paul lost control, and the car crashed in a tunnel, killing Paul and Fayed instantly and leaving Diana and her bodyguard severely injured.[1] Diana was taken to a hospital, where she died several hours later, early on 31 August. Within hours people on both sides of the Atlantic were blaming the chasing photographers—called "paparazzi"—and the media as a whole for the crash, as well as for the culture of celebrity coverage that led to it. Diana's brother, Earl Spencer, was widely quoted on 31 August as saying, "I always believed the press would kill her in the end. But not even I could imagine that they would take such a direct hand in her death as seems to be the case. ...It would appear that every proprietor and editor of every publication that has paid for intrusive and exploitative photographs of her, encouraging greedy and ruthless individuals to risk everything in pursuit of Diana's image, has blood on his hands today."[2]

Though within a few days it became clear that Paul had been drunk and speeding at up to 120 miles per hour, the role of the media in the crash, both directly and indirectly, provoked significant discussion of media ethics and responsibility.[3] Criticism centered on the actual crash and role of the chasing photographers as well as on the role of the media as an institution in providing, or maintaining, an entire culture of celebrity. The case provides an unusual and rare opportunity for examining what the news media themselves said about the media's ethics in a huge, controversial case. While much commentary about the case came in by-lined columns in print media or from identifiable individuals on broadcast media, this research focuses not on individual opinion but on institutional "views" as demonstrated in unsigned newspaper editorials. The purpose here is to explore mainstream media discussions of media ethics; specifically, this case study approaches that discussion by examining how the mainstream print press understood and explained the media's ethics, role, and responsibility (or lack of responsibility) in causing and covering Diana's death. It uses a qualitative analysis of mainstream newspaper editorials that discussed media ethics and responsibility during the month after crash, from 1 September through 30 September 1997. The specific research question was "What were the expressed views of mainstream newspapers on the role and responsibility of the media in the death of the Princess of Wales?"

Theoretical framework

In order to explore how mainstream newspapers viewed the role of the media in Diana's death, this research used attribution theory, which is concerned primarily with how individuals assess causality for actions, how they "understand, predict, and control the world around them."[4] Coming from psychology, attribution theory explores how individuals explain why something happened; it "describes the principles people follow in making judgments about the causes of events, others' behavior, and their own behavior."[5] Weiner notes that this occurs most often "when an outcome is unexpected … and when desires have not been fulfilled."[6] Oskamp, in his summary of the basic assumptions of attribution theory, maintains that individuals use attribution both to explain why something occurred and to make inferences about the characteristics of the person or group acting. Specifically, "people first observe another person's actions and the effects of those actions, then use that information to infer the person's intentions, and finally make attributions about the person's traits or dispositions on the basis of the inferred intentions. This is called the theory of correspondent inferences because the perceiver is trying to form an inference that the person's behavior and the intentions that led to it correspond to an underlying, stable personality characteristic."[7]

One key element of attribution theory particularly relevant here is the concept of internal versus external attribution. First described by Heider in the late 1950s, internal attribution occurs when people attribute the causes of actions to internal, controllable, characteristics of the actor, while external attribution involves attributing the causes of actions to situations external to—and likely uncontrollable by—to the actor.[8] These hold true whether the attributor is observing his or her own actions, or those of others. There are crucial differences in the *uses* of internal and external attribution, though, based on whether the attributor is an actor or an observer. Several researchers have found that individuals tend to attribute their own actions to external factors and the actions of others to internal characteristics, which has been called "the fundamental attribution error."[9] In situations in which an observer sees undesirable behavior or outcomes, the fundamental attribution error leads to blaming the victim or the actor for negative consequences of the action.[10] Ross and DiTecco suggest that "an observer wants to assign blame to the innocent victim of an accident ... because a chance (external) attribution would imply that a misfortune of similar magnitude could occur to anyone, including the observer."[11] Similarly, blaming the actor's internal characteristics for negative consequences enables the observer to distance her- or himself from the situation.

Others, however, suggest that this applies primarily in situations in which the attributor is an observer witnessing the actions of others; in cases involving a negative behavior or outcome caused by (or happening to) the attributor, he or she will usually attribute the cause to external forces.[12] Finally, when observers are attempting to assign causality for a negative outcome, the degree of similarity the observers see between themselves and the actor also influences the attribution. Specifically, "identification or perceived similarity with the harmdoer reduces blaming responses by observers."[13] The more the observer sees him- or herself as like the actor/harmdoer, the less likely he or she is attribute the harm to characteristics internal to the actor.

Clearly, then, attribution theory relates directly to assessment of responsibility and blame. In their study of rape victim blame, Gray et al. conclude that in assessing responsibility for an actor's actions, attributors "are influenced by 1) the social location of the observer and the observed (e.g. their class position, gender, and race); 2) the observer's previous experience (particularly in related activities); 3) the setting; and 4) the potential psychological benefit to be derived from alternate attributions."[14] Weiner[15] concludes that the perceived controllability of the situation is key in assessing responsibility or blame (if the actor could control the outcome, he or she is responsible). And Ross and DiTecco present Heider's five interpretations of responsibility as they relate to attribution:

> At the most primitive level (association), the person is held responsible for any action that is connected with him, however remote.... At the next level (commission), the person is viewed as responsible for anything he causes, even though he could not possibly have foreseen or intended the consequences of his action.... At the third level (foreseeability) the person is perceived as responsible for any result of his actions that he might have foreseen, even though it was not intended.... At the next level (intentionality), the person is seen as responsible only for consequences of his actions that he intended to produce. At this stage the individual is no longer held responsible for the results of accidents. At the fifth and final level (justification), the person is not seen as responsible even for consequences that he intentionally produced if the circumstances were such that anyone would have acted as he did.[16]

Attribution theory has been used to explain rape victim blame,[17] people's images of Arabs during the Gulf War,[18] people's views of those with voluntary versus involuntary disabilities,[19] and to examine various publics' reactions to the O.J. Simpson murder case.[20] Hindman used qualitative methods and attribution theory to examine mainstream newspapers' views of media coverage of the same case. In her study, she concluded that mainstream newspapers 1) distinguished themselves from supermarket-tabloid-style newspapers and then accused the tabloids of irresponsible coverage; 2) acknowledged "problematic coverage generally" but shifted blame beyond media, to Simpson, to others involved in the case, and to the public; and 3) defended the coverage by concluding that either the audience wanted it or that the media were obligated to provide it because of their watchdog role.[21]

Like the coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial, the death of the Princess of Wales led to a significant amount of editorializing on the responsibility—and negative role—of the media in the situation. Attribution theory will be applied here to mainstream newspaper editorials' discussion of the media's possible role as a cause of Princess Diana's death. Key here are the concepts that observers infer traits or characteristics based on actions; that actors tend to blame their own negative behavior or outcomes on external characteristics or situations, while observers blame internal characteristics of others for negative outcomes and behavior; and that attributors hold actors to various levels of responsibility for their actions.

Method

The specific purpose here was to determine how the mainstream print press explained the media's ethics, role and responsibility in the death of the Princess of Wales. Clearly, there is no such thing as a single view of the media as a whole. Mainstream newspapers' unsigned editorials, however, provide the official viewpoint of an individual newspaper, and as such it can be argued that those editorials get as close as is possible to being an institutional voice. Most organizations at one time or another publicly present their organizational or corporate view on an issue or event, and for newspapers, the place that is often done is in the unsigned editorial. Hynds notes that by the middle of the twentieth century newspaper editorials had become "institutionalized."[22] Additionally, in his survey of mainstream newspaper editors, Hynds found that most daily newspapers "devote at least one page each day to editorials and related items."[23] The editors largely agreed that the editorial page "should provide a forum for the exchange of information and opinion and should provide community leadership through institutional stands on issues."[24] Mainstream newspaper editorials, then, were determined to be a good source for institutional views of the mainstream press.

A search was conducted of Lexis-Nexis for editorials on the Princess of Wales in the month immediately following her death on 31 August 1997. The ending date of 30 September 1997 was chosen because by that time consensus was that the driver's drunkenness—and not the chasing photographers—was the primary cause of the accident. The search yielded 77 editorials in mainstream newspapers, 62 of which discussed the media's role in either her death itself or coverage of her death. Those 62 were analyzed qualitatively for the themes from attribution theory mentioned above. The majority—35—of the editorials were published within three days of the accident, with nine on Monday, 1 September, four on 2 September, and 22 on 3 September. Three were published on 4 September, and four on 5 September. Six were published on Saturday, 6 September, the day of Diana's funeral, and three were published on Sunday, 7 September. Finally, three were published on 9 September, one each on 10 and 12 September, two on 14 September, and one each on 15, 16, 18, and 29 September. Clearly, the weight of the discussion of the media's role in Diana's death came within a week of the accident, which is not surprising, given that by 3 September it had become clear that driver Henri Paul was legally drunk and speeding, and thus was at least partially responsible for the crash.

Discussion

Generally, discussion about the ethics of the media's role in Diana's death fell into three categories: blame of the photographers and supermarket tabloids,[25] blame of non-media outsiders, and justification of or acknowledgement of mainstream actions and coverage.

The mainstream newspapers were nearly universal in their condemnation of the "paparazzi," the photographers who follow celebrities, hoping for a candid photo they can then sell to the media. Generally, the mainstream saw the outcome of the crash as controllable—thus the result of internal characteristics. Perhaps because of that, they carefully distanced themselves rhetorically from those who actually chased Diana's car. In addition, in their discussion of responsibility they centered around "commission" (individual or group is responsible for anything they cause) and "foreseeability" (individual or group is responsible for results they could have foreseen), implying that the paparazzi could indeed have prevented Diana's death and that they, the mainstream, were not at all similar to the paparazzi.

"Vultures trolling on the fringes of journalism"—Blaming paparazzi and tabloids

On 1 September, the day after Diana's death, the *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*[26] defined paparazzi for a potentially confused public: "That Italian word," the *Sun-Sentinel* wrote, "means a swarm of stinging, biting insects or of free-lance photographers aggressively pursuing celebrities." Other descriptions of the paparazzi and their actions included "outrageous,"[27] "relentless,"[28] obnoxious,"[29] and "cruel."[30] A number of newspapers used wildlife metaphors to describe the photographers, including "hounding,"[31] "jackals,"[32] "birds of prey,"[33] "bottom-feeders,"[34] "reptilian,"[35] and "wolf pack."[36] According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*,[37] the "feeding frenzy" had worsened as Diana's relationship to Fayed became public. Two newspapers used yet another wildlife image to separate themselves from the paparazzi: The *Hartford Courant*[38] argued that the paparazzi were "vultures troll[ing] on the fringes of journalism," while the *New York Daily News*[39] suggested that they "confirm the worst stereotypes of the media: vultures who will do anything to make money."

In addition to their general outcry against the paparazzi, the mainstream newspapers were very specific in their criticism of the photographers' actions the night of the crash. One week after Diana's death, despite evidence of drunken driving and excessive speed, the *Chapel Hill Herald* refused to absolve the paparazzi. The driver was drunk, the *Herald* admitted in an argument implying commission, "but the plain fact remains that the chase would not have occurred without the pursuing flock of photographers seeking a jackpot of a snapshot."[40] Three days later, the *New York Daily News* agreed: "[A] pack of slavering stalkarazzi were at the center of the fatal chase,"[41] it noted. Others were slightly more charitable, acknowledging other factors in the crash. As early as 1 September, the *Denver Post* suggested that "it is too easy to blame … the predatory paparazzi."[42] The next day more newspapers agreed. "The role of the paparazzi," editorialized one, "is still unclear."[43] Others wrote that there was "ample blame to go around"[44] and that it was "premature to draw any cosmic conclusions."[45] These statements were typical, as many newspapers used internal attribution to lay fault with the paparazzi while acknowledging that the paparazzi could not have controlled the reckless driving that contributed significantly to the crash. Clearly, though, in their discussion of the paparazzi overall, the mainstream saw the paparazzi as unlike themselves, and possessing negative characteristics which had at a minimum contributed to—if they did not outright cause—Diana's death.

Similarly, the mainstream distanced themselves from the supermarket tabloid-style newspapers. Discussion ranged from general condemnation—"checkbook journalism… . tabloid sleaze"[46]—to a call for tabloids to repudiate the paparazzi—"It is time for those tabloid editors to disavow 'stalker-razzi' bounty hunters who go beyond the bounds of decency."[47] In an assumingly accidental irony, one newspaper wrote, "Editors can simply refuse to buy or relay material that goes beyond the bounds of decent intrusion,"[48] apparently distinguishing intrusion by tabloids from the "decent" intrusion by the mainstream. Other newspapers used the language of ethics to call for change. The "senseless, needless Diana tragedy," one wrote, "will shame" the tabloids and their readers.[49] And the *Greensboro News & Record* very clearly placed the discussion into the realm of ethics, when it wrote, "Punishing the paparazzi may make others think twice. But until the publishers develop some moral fiber, it will be open season on celebrities."[50] This statement in particular demonstrated the mainstream's belief that the tabloids' internal characteristic (lack of moral fiber) led indirectly to the chase.

Several editorials singled out certain tabloids for condemnation. The *National Enquirer* came under specific criticism. It had refused to buy the paparazzi's death-scene photos, but it had bought paparazzi photos before and thus had a hand in Diana's death, suggested the *Asheville Citizen-Times*.[51] The *Washington Times* went further. In refusing to buy the death-scene photos, the *Enquirer* demonstrated a "highly selective attack of conscience,"[52] for the *Enquirer* had given significant coverage to Diana's relationship with Fayed in the weeks before their deaths and therefore contributed to the crash itself by providing a market for the photos. The *New York Times* gave a little more credit to the *Enquirer*, though. The *Enquirer*'s editor wanted to "reposition his paper," wrote the *Times*, which "may signal a shift in the tabloid marketplace."[53] And one highly unusual editorial took the CBS Evening News to task for its coverage of 3 September. Anchor Dan Rather and two reporters discussed the role of the supermarket tabloids that night, and concluded that Rupert Murdoch—"media mogul of tabloid sleaze"[54]—was ultimately responsible for Diana's death. The *Augusta Chronicle* was outraged. "Let's get this straight," it wrote. "The CBS gang is fingering Murdoch as the personification of evil in tabloid journalism." The

Chronicle then observed that Murdoch's Fox TV network was in fact competing for network television audiences. "Might that have anything to do with CBS' ridiculous slam?" asked the *Chronicle*, which then equated CBS with Murdoch himself: "They call that 'news'? It's the ugliest kind of tabloid journalism." With that one exception, the mainstream editorials focused on paparazzi and supermarket tabloids, distancing themselves through focus on internal characteristics, including a perceived lack of any sense of morality or ethics, and focus on the commission interpretation of responsibility, in which the paparazzi and tabloids were responsible for the crash, even if they did not intend for it to occur.

"Two-way exploitation"—Blaming outsiders

The paparazzi and supermarket tabloids were not the only groups the editorials blamed for Diana's death. In addition to distancing themselves from their fellow media, the newspapers condemned other groups and individuals outside the media, including Diana herself, celebrities in general, and Henri Paul. The newspapers revealed mixed feelings about Diana and her relationship with the press. Her public life had begun with her engagement and marriage to Prince Charles in 1981 and at the time was described as a fairy tale come true. A number of the newspapers recalled that image at her death, but added that the fairy tale her had "imploded"[55]; hers was a "Cinderella's story in reverse,"[56] that "didn't end with 'And she lived happily ever after.'"[57] To others she was a tragic figure[58] about whom "the ancient Greeks could not have written a sadder script."[59] Yet, she came in for blame because she was a Cinderella who knew how to use media for her own purposes. She used the "double-edged sword of media attention"[60] to outmaneuver her husband in the court of public opinion[61] and was a "master of manipulating the media to her advantage."[62] She begged for privacy, some editorials noted, while feeding tidbits to the press. "Her pleas for privacy, for herself and her two young sons," wrote the *Commercial Appeal*, "were heart-rending. But they were sometimes difficult to square with her frequent appearances on the covers of such magazines as People and Vanity Fair—coverage with which she often cooperated."[63] The *Wisconsin State Journal* was more forceful, suggesting that "Diana herself shared some responsibility for her untimely death" because she had given the paparazzi and other media what they needed in a "two parts parasitic, one part symbiotic" relationship.[64] The blame continued in the *Chicago Tribune*, which also essentially suggested that Diana had a role in her own death: "No one understood the uses of the press better than Diana herself. . . . her celebrity was carefully cultivated and adroitly used."[65] But the *Tribune* continued on a positive note: "Knowing how to use the press allowed Diana to make perhaps her greatest achievement ... investing the anachronistic roles of princess and royal with real significance for good causes in a democratic world." Others remembered her use of the media for good causes as well. The *St. Petersburg Times* wrote that she used her celebrity status to gain coverage for AIDS, humanitarian causes in Bosnia and Angola, and to campaign against land mines.[66] Oddly, only one newspaper noted that the only person to survive the crash was also the only one wearing a seat belt.[67] Blaming Diana apparently did not cover questioning whether she should have acted to keep herself safe.

The mainstream newspapers were very clear in their assessment of Diana as someone who knew how to use the media to her advantage—an internal characteristic they then used to blame her for the paparazzi's presence that night in Paris. Other celebrities were similarly criticized for their love-hate relationship with the media and for using the media to further their careers while complaining about the coverage. The *Columbus Dispatch*, for example, suggested that celebrities often bring over-the-line media coverage on themselves, through "assiduously court[ing] publicity when it suits their purposes."[68] The *Daily News of Los Angeles* clearly blamed celebrities rather than the media, writing that "[celebrities'] status and hunger for fame ...drive this whole system of frantic photography by pursuing hordes of cameramen."[69] The *Providence Journal-Bulletin* took a number of individual celebrities to task in an editorial titled "Two-Way Exploitation." It sarcastically described actress Fran Drescher as "riven by grief" and crusading against supermarket tabloids. But, editorialized the *Journal-Bulletin*, "This is getting out of hand. The only reason anyone is paying attention to what Fran Drescher has to say about anything is because she is a relentlessly ambitious and publicity-minded entertainer who courts the attention of the media, including the tabloids."[70] Actors George Clooney, Alec Baldwin and Tom Cruise also had held press conferences to complain about tabloids and paparazzi. None of these actors, the *Journal-Bulletin* continued, "as far as we know, has expressed remorse about his professional success or stratospheric wealth." In this editorial, at least, celebrities were most certainly held accountable for the actions of the media. Others gave celebrities a bit more room. Just because they are famous because of media coverage, suggested one, they do not give up their rights not to be stalked or harassed, particularly in private situations.[71] The *Commercial Appeal* summarized this perspective well in a clear example of external attribution: "The curse of celebrity is that it finally cannot be controlled by those who achieve it."[72] To these newspapers, then, Diana and other celebrities are not to blame for media coverage.

Not surprisingly, driver Henri Paul received heavy criticism. By 3 September Paris officials had reported Paul's blood alcohol level at .187 percent, almost four times the legal limit in France, and that he had been speeding at at least 100 miles per hour. Most who discussed Paul acknowledged the paparazzi's role in the chase but maintained that Paul's choice to drive drunk and too fast contributed at least equally to the crash. He "showed appalling judgment,"[73] and was "foolish."[74] Some newspapers used external attribution nearly to absolve the paparazzi altogether, for Paul was "taunting the media pack,"[75] saying, as the *Asheville Citizen-Times* put it, "catch me if you can."[76] For most, however, the crash was caused by the combination of chasing paparazzi, a drunken driver and excessive speed, all of which were presented as controllable—and thus internal—characteristics of those involved.

Though Diana and Henri Paul were the only individuals blamed by name, the newspapers reserved venom for the public at large, which they said also played a significant role in Diana's death. As with the descriptions of the paparazzi, metaphors abounded in the descriptions of the public; this time the comparison was Diana as food: "The public fed its obsession" with Diana through the photographs; readers' "appetite for news" of her led them to "gobble up" stories about her;[77] the Diana phenomenon was "voraciously consumed,"[78] and the public's "hunger"[79] and "unquenchable thirst"[80] for her were "insatiable."[81] Others described the public and culture at large as "celebrity-crazed"[82] and sardonically noted a certain hypocrisy: "[W]ho among us now expressing revulsion at the paparazzi's tactics," editorialized *New York Newsday*, "closed their eyes to the sunnier images of a scantily clad Diana yachting through the Mediterranean with her beau? And who will shun the special 'Diana' editions that will now proliferate as fast as publishers can bring them to market?"[83] Finally, some bluntly laid blame for her death squarely with her fans. The *Atlanta Constitution* summarized these beliefs clearly: "This week, many of Diana's loyal fans will be weeping for their tragic heroine, but if they had not purchased the papers that exploited in the first place, she might not be dead."[84] In each of these cases the newspapers concluded that the public bore at least some responsibility for Diana's death, which then removed some of that responsibility from the paparazzi, the tabloids and the media as a whole.

Of course the public received its information from the media, so in blaming Diana's fans the newspapers had created a dilemma for themselves. They solved it primarily through justifying the coverage based on the wishes of the market, and returning blame again to the consumers. The photographer who shot the first photograph of Diana and Dodi Fayed apparently sold that photo in summer 1997 for $10 million,[85] certainly giving incentive to other photographers. Some newspapers seemed to forgive the photographers, for freelancers "cannot pass up that lucrative lure."[86] Others were not quite willing to go that far, but did acknowledge the market forces present in the paparazzi-tabloid-audience mix. A number of the newspapers saw what appeared to be a logical solution to this market problem: The audiences should simply stop buying. "The best check on tabloid journalism ..." wrote *the Commercial Appeal*, "[is] the discipline of the marketplace.... If [the] audience were to disappear, if readers worldwide were to show their revulsion by refusing to patronize trash tabloids and their broadcast equivalents, the paparazzi and other scandal-sheet purveyors would be out of work tomorrow."[87] Others agreed. "[C]onsumers can refuse to fuel the frenzy with their dollars," wrote the *Denver Post*.[88] "People ... should stop supporting the tabloid press and watching tabloid television programs," noted the *Hartford Courant*.[89] The *San Francisco Chronicle* suggested that audiences were responsible for, and could control, content: "The most effective and independent enforcers of taste are readers, who deliver their judgments at the newsstand."[90] A few repudiated this internal attribution and acknowledged the difficulties of expecting audiences and the market to define media ethics. The *Daily News of Los Angeles* described the interconnections between celebrities, freelance photographers, the media and the audiences as "a tragic circle. Once the cycle of publicity and exposure gets started, those why try to benefit from it and to control it may be shocked to discover that it can't be turned off like a switch."[91] This view was not typical, however. The majority of the discussions of the audience's role and the marketplace used those as excuses, distancing the tabloids, and indeed all media, from blame for Diana's death.

"Respectable journalists" and "We are all accountable"—The role of the mainstream media

The third major theme to arise from the editorials concerned the mainstream media themselves. While paparazzi were more directly involved with Diana's death, all media came under criticism in the days following the crash. In response, the editorials generally adopted one of several stances. Some very specifically distanced themselves from the paparazzi and supermarket tabloids; some acknowledged similarities among the various types of media; and a few accepted responsibility themselves.

Most vociferous were the newspapers separating themselves from the paparazzi and tabloids. These newspapers saw a clear difference between mainstream media and those more directly responsible for Diana's death. They distinguished themselves carefully, explaining that "legitimate journalism recognizes and respects the difference between public officials' and famous people's *public* conduct and their right to privacy";[92] "Respectable journalists don't chase their prey on motor scooters";[93] and "There is a line that a publication of character does not cross."[94] The *Chicago Tribune* attempted to draw that line specifically: "Serious newspapers and other serious media. . . . are recorders and reporters of events, not manufacturers of them."[95] A few newspapers made specific commitments designed to separate themselves further from the paparazzi. For example, the *Indianapolis Star* wrote, "The *Star* and *News* don't trespass, we don't stalk celebrities, and we don't purchase pictures from people who do."[96] The *New York Daily News* took a similar stance, and called on other media to follow: "By refusing to publish unauthorized photos of Diana's children, *The News* aims to help eliminate the financial incentive for taking them. We do it in the name of decency. But only if the rest of the media does the same will the era of the stalking paparazzi finally be finished."[97] These newspapers, by implication, could control themselves through their inherent decency, unlike the supermarket tabloids.

Some of the newspapers were particularly worried about potential backlash—either through legal means or public opinion—against all news media. The *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, which perhaps was more sensitive than other mainstream newspapers because of its proximity to the headquarters of the *National Enquirer*, wrote, "First of all, there is no such thing as 'the press.' … 'The press' didn't kill Diana, but a few irresponsible, unprofessional and morally bankrupt photographers might have contributed to her death. If illegal acts occurred, then arrest, prosecute and severely punish those responsible."[98] The *Detroit News* agreed, writing, "the paparazzi can be a pretty disgusting lot, [but] they shouldn't become an excuse for muzzling a free press."[99] And they had legitimate cause for concern. By the day after Diana's death there were already calls for legislation to limit press invasions of privacy, and by the middle of the month at least two state legislators (in California[100] and Connecticut[101]) and one member of Congress had introduced, or were considering introducing, legislation to curb media access to celebrities. To the general calls for stricter laws, the newspapers replied, first, that France already had the strictest privacy laws in Europe but that none had been violated,[102] and second, that in the United States existing trespass, stalking, and harassment laws provided enough protection to celebrities and ordinary citizens.[103] Several made a public's-right-to-know argument, noting that one of the costs of maintaining a free press is a loss of privacy. The *Detroit News*, for example, wrote, "[W]here do you draw the line and still protect the right of the public to have the information necessary to make informed judgments about people and policies that affect their lives, particularly people who so actively court publicity?"[104] And the *New York Times* reacted forcefully to proposals by California State Sen. Tom Hayden (the ex-husband of actress Jane Fonda) and U.S. Rep. Sonny Bono (himself a celebrity) to increase privacy rights at the expense of press freedom. "[I]t would be a grave loss for the United States," editorialized the *Times*, "with its freer and more vital journalism, to mark this sad death with a rush to bad, unnecessary and potentially unconstitutional legislation... . [T]here is simply no way to draft a statute to prevent picture-taking in public places without resorting to the language and methods of censorship."[105] The *Chicago Tribune*, too, defended the press against Rep. Bono's "Protection from Personal Intrusion Bill," which would have punished "persistently" following someone when that individual had a "reasonable expectation of privacy." This might include, the *Tribune* noted, "an ambush interview on CNN, CBS's '60 Minutes,' NBC's 'Dateline' or ABC's 'Nightline.'"[106] The implication, of course, was that interviews on those mainstream networks are valuable and worth protecting, while perhaps interviews or photos from non-mainstream media were not.

While the majority of the newspapers blamed others—the paparazzi and supermarket tabloids, Diana, the public—for the crash and general coverage of celebrities, a few acknowledged that the line separating mainstream media from the supermarket tabloids was blurry, and consequently, set themselves up to share responsibility. As Diana's relationship with Dodi Fayed had become public during the summer of 1997, noted the *News & Record*, mainstream media had covered the story, "justif[ying its] 'news value' by reporting that the London tabloids were having a feeding frenzy over Di and Dodi. Either way, readers got the same story and pictures."[107] The same editorial—and others, as well—expressed outrage at video and photos of Diana's sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, taken in the days following her death. In particular, video of the boys in a car on their way to church the morning after the crash provoked wrath. The paparazzi were there, shooting photos, but "so were mainstream photographers. Pictures of the two boys, their faces pale and drawn, appeared on network television shows and in the *New York Times* and other prominent newspapers." Other newspapers agreed. The *Baltimore Sun* also condemned the day-after photos of William and Harry, and noted that if the crash had not happened, "photos of Di and Dodi in that car would have would up even in respectable publications."[108] The consensus among a small number of the newspapers was that the difference between 'respectable publications' and supermarket tabloids was minimal. The *Wall Street Journal* painted a vivid picture of its perspective: "It is remarkable to see a professional mind-set that studiously reports the sins of the tabloids and paparazzi," editorialized the *Journal*, "even as it shoves its own sump pumps deep into the life of Lady Diana and runs the open hoses onto the nation's living room floors."[109]

Finally, a few newspapers took the next step and accepted blame, either for the mainstream media at large or for themselves. Typically this was accompanied by a call to action, as when the *New York Daily News* promised not to buy or publish unauthorized photos of Prince William and Prince Harry, and concluded that "the media have an obligation to exercise self-discipline."[110] Similarly, the *Columbus Dispatch* suggested, "it is up to editors at newspapers and magazines and in television to exhibit a conscience."[111] The *Baltimore Sun* wrote simply, "[W]e are all accountable,"[112] and the *Sun-Sentinel* called for "a return to some old-fashioned personal virtues—like restraint, professionalism, human decency and adherence to the Golden Rule."[113] But only the *Denver Post* took direct responsibility, when it editorialized, "Today we collectively hang our heads and promise to do better. We here at The Post know of our own contribution. . . ."[114] As other newspapers had done with the tabloids, these newspapers saw internal characteristics of the media as contributing to Diana's death. The difference, of course, was here it was their own characteristics, rather than those distinctive to the tabloids, which had led ultimately to the crash. These newspapers saw themselves as not so different from the paparazzi and supermarket tabloids, thus, they acknowledged the responsibility they felt for the crash and media coverage that contributed to it.

Conclusion

The purpose here was to determine how the mainstream print press understood and explained the media's ethics, role, and responsibility in causing and covering Princess Diana's death in a car crash. The study of 62 newspaper editorials published within a month of her death found three general themes. First, the mainstream press distanced themselves from the paparazzi who chased her car the night of her death, as well as from the supermarket tabloids that typically purchased pictures from those photographers. Second, the mainstream shifted blame to those outside the media, in particular Diana herself, her driver, and the public at large, each of whom was blamed in some way for the crash. Third, some of the mainstream newspapers acknowledged their similarities to the supermarket tabloids and consequently accepted some blame for their part in the general culture of celebrity that indirectly led to Diana's death.

The perspectives presented in the editorials demonstrated several key elements of attribution theory. Of the five interpretations, or levels, of responsibility initially outlined by Heider, two frequently appeared. Many editorials offered a "commission" interpretation of the responsibility of the paparazzi and supermarket tabloids—that is, those individuals and organizations were seen as responsible for Diana's death even though they did not intend to cause the crash. Other editorials used a "foreseeability" interpretation, concluding that the paparazzi and tabloids could have, and should have, foreseen the possibility of the crash and thus could have prevented it. There was little or no evidence of other interpretations—such as intentionality and justification—that would have removed responsibility from the tabloids and paparazzi.

Internal attribution appeared frequently in the editorials. This aspect of attribution theory concludes that people attribute causes of actions to the internal, controllable, characteristics of the actor, at least when there is a negative outcome to the action. In this case, the innate characteristics of the paparazzi (they are vultures) and the supermarket tabloids (they are greedy, and willing to pay huge sums for photos) "caused" the crash. The editorials used internal attribution in these cases to separate themselves from the tabloids and paparazzi, to argue that they—the mainstream—are not like the "bottom-feeders" of journalism. In addition, they also concluded that because these characteristics are controllable, the paparazzi and tabloids could have prevented Diana's death had they acted differently.

The editorials offered contradictory arguments as well. Many also blamed Diana herself, her driver, or the public at large, suggesting that characteristics internal to those individuals or groups led to the crash. This internal attribution led to the conclusion that Diana, the driver, and the public also could have changed the outcome that night.

Blaming non-media individuals or groups for the crash also provided an example of external attribution, for when the editorials concluded that Diana had used the media for her own benefit, that Henri Paul had drunk too much and driven too fast, and that the public had desired information about Diana too much, they removed blame from the media. If the crash was Diana's fault, or the driver's, for example, it was less the responsibility of the paparazzi, the tabloids, or the media at large. The argument blaming those outside the media functioned, then, at least partially to absolve the media.

Relatively few editorials accepted blame, even generally. Those that did used internal attribution, noting that all media share certain characteristics, which led at least indirectly to Diana's death. All of the newspapers that did accept blame, either for the media at large or themselves specifically, called for a change in the media's ethics or actions.

This findings in this case study are similar in some aspects to an earlier case study of the media's views of the media's ethics in the O.J. Simpson case. That study found that the mainstream press sometimes defended coverage of Simpson, either by defining the coverage as good for democracy or by concluding that the public wanted it. Though the press in the Diana case never argued that coverage of her that night was "good for democracy," there was some defense of the coverage based on public wishes. The Simpson study also found that the mainstream media distinguished themselves from the supermarket tabloids and then accused them of irresponsible behavior, and that the mainstream shifted blame to Simpson, others involved in his case, and the public at large. Those themes certainly repeated themselves in the present case.

It appears, then, that in major cases involving questionable media actions or ethics, the mainstream press tends to distance itself as much as possible from blame. It does so much as most of us do, by defining negative characteristics of others as responsible for the negative outcome, or by concluding that external forces, out of the media's control, caused the unethical behavior. Further research on future cases—and undoubtedly they will occur—will help determine if the discussion and blame surrounding the role of the media in Diana's death were unusual or typical.

---

[1] The bodyguard survived.

[2] Quoted in Jacqueline Sharkey, "The Diana Aftermath," *American Journalism Review* 19 (Nov. 1997): 19.

[3] For example, in the months following the crash both *American Journalism Review* and *Editor and Publisher* devoted significant space to examination of the media's role in the incident, and a Lexis-Nexis search of newspaper editorial content (not news stories) for the month after her death using the terms "Diana" and "media" or "news" yielded 454 columns, 27 signed editorials and 77 editorials. Refereed research on the incident has focused on the impact of Diana's death on popular culture as well as on the media. See, for example, Tony Walter, "From Cathedral to Supermarket: Mourning, Silence and Solidarity," *The Sociological Review* 49(4, 2000): 494-511; J. Mallory Wober, "A Feeding Frenzy, or Feeling Friendsy? Events After the Death of Diana, Princess of Wales," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34 (summer 2000): 127-134; Dan Berkowitz, "Doing Double Duty: Paradigm Repair and the Princess Diana What-a-story," Journalism 1 (August 2000): 125-144.

[4] Stuart Oskamp, *Attitudes and Opinions*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1991), 34.

[5] Karen Huffman et al., *Psychology in Action*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons), 549.

[6] Bernard Weiner, "The Emotional Consequences of Causal Attributions," in *Affect and Cognition: the Seventeenth Annual Carnegie Symposium on Cognition*, ed. By Margaret Sydnor Clark and Susan T. Fiske. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1982), 185-186.

[7] Oskamp, 35.

[8] Oskamp, 34.

[9] Huffman et al., 551; Oskamp, 43; Daniel Heradstveit and G. Matthew Bonham, "Attribution Theory and Arab Images of the Gulf War," *Political Psychology* 17(2): 274.

[10] Huffman et al., 551; Oskamp, 43.

[11] Michael Ross and Don DiTecco, "An Attributional Analysis of Moral Judgments," Journal of Social Issues 31 (3): 95.

[12] Heradstveit and Bonham, 275.

[13] Ross and DiTecco, 97.

[14] Norma B. Gray, Gloria J. Palileo and G. David Johnson, "Explaining Rape Victim Blame: A Test of Attribution Theory," Sociological Spectrum 13(4): 378.

[15] Weiner, 188.

[16] Ross and DiTecco, 93-94.

[17] Gray et al.

[18] Heradstveit and Bonham.

[19] Laurie Larwood, "Attributional Effects of Equal Employment Opportunity: Theory Development at the Intersection of EEO Policy and Management Practice," Group and Organization Management 20(4): 391.

[20] Sandra Graham, Bernard Weiner and Gail Sahar Zucker, "An Attributional Analysis of Punishment Goals and Public Reactions to O.J. Simpson," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23(4): 331.

[21] Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, "'Lynch-Mob Journalism' vs. 'Compelling Human Drama': Editorial Responses to Coverage of the Pretrial Phase of the O.J. Simpson Case," Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly 76(3): 499-515.

[22] Ernest C. Hynds, "Changes in Editorials: A Study of Three Newspapers, 1955-1985," *Journalism Quarterly* 67(2): 302-312

[23] Ernest C. Hynds, "Editors at Most U.S. Dailies See Vital Roles for Editorial Page" *Journalism Quarterly* 71(3): 574.

[24] Hynds, "Editors at Most U.S. Dailies," 575.

[25] Here both "tabloids" and "supermarket tabloids" are used to describe a particular genre of newspaper, which largely focuses on celebrities and sensationalized news. These are distinguished from tabloid-format newspapers like the *Rocky Mountain News*, which are considered "mainstream."

[26] "Death of 'People's Princess' Shines Spotlight on Privacy and Paparazzi," *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.

[27] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.

[28] "Mourning a Lost Princess," *Indianapolis News*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[29] "Paparazzi and Freedom of the Press," *Tampa Tribune*, 5 September 1997, p. 8.

---

[30] "The People's Princess: Diana's Compassion Made the World Love Her," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.
[31] "Princess Diana's Death," *Washington Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 20; "A World Without Diana Will be Lean, and Not Only for Tabloids," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, sec. A, p. 11.
[32] "The Victim of Jackals," *Miami Herald*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 22; "Who is Responsible for Diana's Death?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.
[33] "The Blame Game Grows," *Boston Herald*, 3 September 1997, p. 22.
[34] "Her Death was Tragic, Her Life Often Inspiring," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 8.
[35] "Princess Di: Tabloid Stalkers Not Sole Culprits," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[36] "Diana's Death—Many Causes of Tragedy," *Charleston Gazette*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 4; "Dems Divided—and Conquered," *New York Daily News*, 10 September 1997, p. 32.
[37] "Unhappily Ever After," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 3 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.
[38] "A Shock Felt Around the World," *Hartford Courant*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 12.
[39] "The Grief and its Lessons," *New York Daily News*, 1 September 1997, sec. Special, p. 8.
[40] "Tragedy Should Turn Media to Self-Regulation," *Chapel Hill (N.C.) Herald*, 7 September 1997, p. 4.
[41] "Dems Divided—and Conquered," *New York Daily News*, 10 September 1997, p. 32.
[42] "Death of a Princess," *Denver Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 11.
[43] "The Tragedy of Diana: At the Mercy of Strangers," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[44] "Many Share Fault for Diana's Fate," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 9.
[45] "Princess Di: Tabloid Stalkers Not Sole Culprits," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[46] "The People's Princess: Diana's Compassion Made the World Love Her," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.
[47] "She was the Queen of People's Hearts," *Dallas Morning News*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 34.
[48] "Death of a Princess," *Denver Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 11.
[49] "Diana's Death—Many Causes of Tragedy," *Charleston Gazette*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 4.
[50] "The Tragedy of Diana; At the Mercy of Strangers," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[51] "Our Fascination with Celebrity Sows Seeds of Tragedy," *Asheville (N.C.) Citizen-Times*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[52] "Media Vultures, Revisited," *Washington Times*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 16.
[53] "A Sad Death, a Bad Law," *New York Times*, 15 September 1997, sec. A, p. 22.
[54] "CBS Smears Murdoch," *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, 14 September 1997, sec. A, p. 4, quoting Dan Rather.
[55] "Death of a Princess," *Denver Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 11.
[56] "The Victim of Jackals," *Miami Herald*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 22.
[57] "Diana Truly Was Princess of the People," *Albuquerque Journal*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 8.
[58] "Mourning a Lost Princess," *Indianapolis News*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.
[59] "Princess Diana," *Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, 3 September 1997, Sec. A, p. 4.
[60] "Grief for a Princess," *Raleigh (N.C.) News and Observer*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 12.
[61] "She was the Queen of People's Hearts," *Dallas Morning News*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 34.
[62] "The Tragedy of Diana; At the Mercy of Strangers," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.
[63] "Her Death was Tragic, Her Life Often Inspiring," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 8.
[64] "Many Share Fault for Diana's Fate," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 9.
[65] "The Princess, the Press, the Public," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 September 1997, p. 10.
[66] "The Passing of a Princess," *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.
[67] "Two-Way Exploitation," *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, 5 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.
[68] "'Paparazzi'" Where Should the Media Draw the Line?" *Columbus Dispatch*, 18 September 1997, sec. A, p. 12.
[69] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.
[70] "Two-Way Exploitation," *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, 5 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.

---

[71] "Privacy and the Press: Beyond Tabloids: Princess Diana's Death Gives Mainstream Media Cause for Reflection," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[72] "Her Death was Tragic, Her Life Often Inspiring," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 8.

[73] "Many Share Fault for Diana's Fate," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 9.

[74] "Paparazzi and Freedom of the Press," *Tampa Tribune*, 5 September 1997, p. 8.

[75] "The Blame Game Grows," *Boston Herald*, 3 September 1997, p. 22.

[76] "Our Fascination with Celebrity Sows Seeds of Tragedy," *Asheville (N.C.) Citizen-Times*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 6.

[77] "A World Without Diana Will be Lean, and Not Only for Tabloids," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, sec. A, p. 11.

[78] "Crossing the Line," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 14.

[79] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.

[80] "Deadly Pursuit: Paparazzi and the Public Need to Reexamine the Obsession with Celebrity Journalism," *New York Newsday*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 38.

[81] "Death of 'People's Princess' Shines Spotlight on Privacy and Paparazzi," *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18; "Unhappily Ever After," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 3 September 1997, sec. B, p. 6.

[82] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.

[83] "Deadly Pursuit: Paparazzi and the Public Need to Reexamine the Obsession with Celebrity Journalism," *New York Newsday*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 38.

[84] "A Princess Loved to Death," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.

[85] "A World Without Diana Will be Lean, and Not Only for Tabloids," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, sec. A, p. 11.

[86] "The Grief and its Lessons," *New York Daily News*, 1 September 1997, sec. Special, p. 8.

[87] "Her Death was Tragic, Her Life Often Inspiring," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 8.

[88] "Death of a Princess," *Denver Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 11.

[89] "A Shock Felt Around the World," *Hartford Courant*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 12.

[90] "Who is Responsible for Diana's Death?" *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.

[91] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.

[92] "The Victim of Jackals," *Miami Herald*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 22.

[93] "Diana's Death—Many Causes of Tragedy," *Charleston Gazette*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 4, quoting the *New York Times'* Walter Goodman.

[94] "Crossing the Line," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 14.

[95] "The Princess, the Press, the Public," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 September 1997, p. 10.

[96] "Crossing the Line," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 14.

[97] "Dems Divided—and Conquered," *New York Daily News*, 10 September 1997, p. 32.

[98] "Death of 'People's Princess' Shines Spotlight on Privacy and Paparazzi," *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.

[99] "Princess Diana and the Press," *Detroit News*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[100] "Circle of Tragedy: There's a Use-me, Use-you Relationship Between Celebrities and Photographers," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 3 September 1997, sec. N, p. 14.

[101] "Stalking Laws: Leave Tough Enough Alone," *Hartford Courant*, 12 September 1997, sec. A, p. 20.

[102] "The Passing of a Princess," *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[103] "Princess Diana and the Press," *Detroit News*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10; "Crossing the Line," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 14; "Privacy and the Press: Beyond Tabloids: Princess Diana's Death Gives Mainstream Media Cause for Reflection," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[104] "Princess Diana and the Press," *Detroit News*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[105] "A Sad Death, a Bad Law," *New York Times*, 15 September 1997, sec. A, p. 22.

[106] "A Tangled Leash on Paparazzi," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 September 1997, p. 10.

---

[107] "A World Without Diana Will be Lean, and Not Only for Tabloids," *Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record*, sec. A, p. 11.

[108] "Privacy and the Press: Beyond Tabloids: Princess Diana's Death Gives Mainstream Media Cause for Reflection," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[109] "From O.J. to Diana," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 1997, sec. A, p. 20.

[110] "Dems Divided—and Conquered," *New York Daily News*, 10 September 1997, p. 32.

[111] " 'Paparazzi'" Where Should the Media Draw the Line?" *Columbus Dispatch*, 18 September 1997, sec. A, p. 12.

[112] "Privacy and the Press: Beyond Tabloids: Princess Diana's Death Gives Mainstream Media Cause for Reflection," *Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1997, sec. A, p. 10.

[113] "Death of 'People's Princess' Shines Spotlight on Privacy and Paparazzi," *Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 18.

[114] "Death of a Princess," *Denver Post*, 1 September 1997, sec. B, p. 11.

The Promise and Peril of Anecdotes in News Coverage:

An Ethical Analysis

For presentation in the Media Ethics Division
at the AEJMC annual meeting
Miami Beach, Florida

August 7, 2002

By David A. Craig

Associate Professor
Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Oklahoma
860 Van Vleet Oval, Room 120-B
Norman, OK 73019-2051
Phone: (405) 325-5206
E-mail: dcraig@ou.edu

Running head: THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF ANECDOTES

Abstract

The Promise and Peril of Anecdotes in News Coverage: An Ethical Analysis

This analytical essay assesses the use of anecdotes in news coverage on ethical grounds, pointing both to their promise and to their potential dangers. The argument draws on Craig's framework for analyzing news coverage of ethics; on Christians, Ferre, and Fackler's communitarian ethic; and on Gilligan's relationship-oriented ethic. Examples from news stories illustrate the ethical complexity of anecdotes. The essay also suggests how journalists can choose anecdotes more critically and points to an adaptation of the anecdotal form that is ethically more supportable.

THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF ANECDOTES IN NEWS COVERAGE: AN ETHICAL ANALYSIS

Journalists in both print and broadcast media often use anecdotes about individuals to provide compelling illustrations of the larger points of stories. Anecdotes humanize coverage of public-policy issues – by, for example, showing how a tax increase might affect one person. Sometimes they illustrate the complexity of the impact of decisions by seemingly distant government agencies or corporations.

Research on exemplification in news coverage – the use of examples about individuals, such as anecdotes (e.g. Aust and Zillmann, 1996; Gibson and Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann and Brosius, 2000; Zillmann et al., 1996) -- has shown that exemplars do shape people's perceptions of social issues. For example, Zillmann et al. (1996) found in an experiment that changes in the kinds of exemplars used in a news report on the plight of family farmers altered readers' perceptions of the how prevalent family farm failures were. In addition, studies of framing effects (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997; Valkenburg, Semetko & De Vreese, 1999) have found that episodic and human interest frames -- in which anecdotes are often an element -- affect audiences' thinking in important ways. Particularly important for the present study, Iyengar (1991) found that episodic framing, focusing news coverage on individuals and events, tends to prompt TV news audiences to attribute responsibility for issues to individuals rather than social factors. Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese (1999) found that stories framed in terms of human interest prompted readers to emphasize emotions and implications for individuals more often, and to recall less information about an issue (in the case of crime).

Journalists themselves sometimes show awareness of the difficulties posed by anecdotes. Gina Kolata, a science reporter for The New York Times, has said:

> I think anecdotes are actually almost too powerful. I always call it the "tyranny of the anecdote." You have to be really careful with anecdotes because people will remember the anecdote and it will mean more to them than anything else you say. So you have to be very, very careful, I think, about how you use them, but I think that they're so powerful that they sort of cry out to be used if they can. (personal communication, April 29, 1997)

The significance of anecdotes for how audiences understand the social world makes them a topic that merits ethical examination. Rather than testing the effects of anecdotes on audience understanding, as the exemplification literature has done, this analytical essay assesses the use of anecdotes on ethical grounds, pointing both to their promise and to their potential dangers. The argument will draw on Craig's (1999a) framework for analyzing news coverage of ethical issues in professions and society, on the concerns of communitarian media ethics (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993), and on Gilligan's (1982) relationship-oriented feminist ethics. These perspectives are relevant to discussion of anecdotes because they state or imply a need for news stories to address topics both at the level of the individual and in their broader contexts.

The ethical analysis will point to examples from several cases of news coverage of issues connected with medicine and science, all of which received widespread attention from the public and professionals during the 1990s: the practices of health maintenance organizations, the debate over federal policy on human embryo research, the development and ethics of genetic testing, the prospect of human cloning, and the legal and ethical controversy over physician-assisted suicide. The examples include stories from major print and broadcast news organizations – organizations that should reflect the state of the art in use of anecdotes in reporting, however flawed that art may be. The examples, chosen after examination of broader groups of stories on these topics,[1] reflect some of the most verbally or visually compelling uses of anecdotes in the cases studied. Although the examples focus on medicine and science – important areas because of their life-and-death import -- they also touch on the portrayal of other professions such as business and government.

Beyond offering an ethical critique of the use of anecdotes, this essay will point to ways in which journalists can choose anecdotes more critically – building on Boeyink's (1992) discussion of casuistry in journalistic decision-making. The discussion will also suggest an adaptation of the anecdotal form that is ethically more supportable.

The Ethical Promise of Anecdotes

It is unlikely that journalists would use anecdotes in so many stories if they did not believe, with Kolata, that anecdotes are a powerful tool for grabbing audiences' attention and making seemingly abstract issues concrete. And the very power of anecdotes points to the fact that, from several perspectives in ethical theory, the use of anecdotes is an ethical good – even if it is not an unmixed one.

Craig's (1999a) framework for studying coverage of news with an ethical dimension underlines the potential ethical benefits of anecdotes. Craig (1997, 1999a) argued that ethics coverage should be carefully analyzed. Under this framework, stories are to be evaluated "based on how thoroughly they portray the ethical issues relevant to a topic, the parties connected with those issues, the levels at which the ethical issues play out [individual, organizational/institutional, professional, and social], and the legal backdrop for those issues" (Craig, 1999a, p. 17). Coverage that addresses these areas well is itself considered to be ethical. This framework has been applied in analyses of ethics coverage (Craig, 2000a, 2000b, 2002;

Craig & Pantic, 2001). However, it is relevant to evaluation of the use of anecdotes in a variety of news stories, even those that do not portray ethical issues.

Craig's (1999a) consideration of levels of analysis, including the level of the individual, underlines the importance of the individual dimension as a domain for news coverage. In this view, strong news coverage should address topics at the level of individuals and families affected by decisions or events – such as a health maintenance organization's decision about whether to approve or deny coverage for a kind of cancer treatment. Anecdotes serve well to shine light on the difficulties that individuals face, and therefore they are agents of ethical journalism in that sense.

Christians, Ferre, and Fackler's (1993) communitarian media ethic also provides ethical justification for the use of anecdotes to highlight the situations of individuals. This ethic is profoundly concerned with the social level, but its deep concern for mutuality and social justice points to profound interest in drawing attention to the difficulties of individuals, especially those who are hurting or marginalized.

> A press nurtured by communitarian ethics requires more of itself than fair treatment of events deemed worthy of coverage. Under the notion that justice itself – and not merely haphazard public enlightenment – is a *telos* of the press, the news-media system stands under obligation to tell the stories that justice requires. (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, p. 93)

Part of telling "the stories that justice requires" appropriately involves telling the stories of individuals because justice must address right treatment of individuals – such as poor people whose health concerns are being ignored by a corporation that is polluting the water in their area.

One of the most powerful ways, in fact, to draw attention to such individuals is through the telling of their stories, in words and images, in print and broadcast media.

Like Christians, Ferre, and Fackler's (1993) communitarian ethic, Gilligan's (1982) feminist ethic lends support to the use of anecdotes. Gilligan's ethic underlines the importance of relationships and responsibilities in the moral life of women (1982, pp. 16-17). Anecdotes are ethically significant in this context because they can help to portray the web of personal relationships and responsibilities involved in ethical situations. Anecdotes can dramatically represent the difficulties that individuals, including women facing illnesses such as breast cancer, face in relation to their families and others outside their families, such as physicians. The power of such anecdotes was evident in Craig's earlier study of genetic testing coverage (2000b).

Gilligan's (1982) concern for a web of relationships also points back to another aspect of the Craig (1999a) model – its attention to the relevant parties in news coverage. Ethics coverage (or, more broadly, news coverage) at its best should include an array of sources, including – in a story involving both professionals and public – neither exclusively professionals (such as doctors or business people) or non-professionals (patients or customers). Good anecdotes, although they focus on an individual, may point out how that individual interacts with other people, as well as with organizations and institutions.

Three examples from coverage of stories about ethics in medicine and science will illustrate the power of anecdotes to portray an issue at the individual level, the level of personal relationships.

George Strait (1994) used an anecdote to help illustrate an ABC TV news story about human embryo research, run just after a federal advisory panel recommended that federal funding be used to pay for research on human embryos. The story shows a girl born after genetic testing of her mother's embryos, and Strait talks with the girl's father. Strait describes the treatment that brought this girl into the world, against the backdrop of video that includes shots of her:

> This research on human embryos has vast potential, from improving fertility and contraceptives to better screening for genetic diseases. Take Brittany Abshire [baby is shown wearing a bow on her head and a fancy dress]. Her parents, Rene and David Abshire, were afraid they might never have a healthy baby. Their first child, Meaghan [face is shown close-up in a still portrait], died of a rare genetic disease called Tay-Sachs. They got help here at the Jones Institute, where doctors recently developed a way to test an embryo for defective genes. Her deformed embryos were discarded; only healthy ones were implanted through in vitro fertilization. The result is Brittany [the dressed-up baby is shown again]. (Strait, 1994)[2]

By showing compelling video of real people affected by embryo research -- especially children -- Strait brings home the reality that this ethical topic touches more than experts, policymakers, and researchers. He also points to the web of family relationships in which the individuals are affected profoundly by the decisions made about in vitro fertilization. In addition, he uses professionals elsewhere in the story to point to others involved in these kinds of cases, including a doctor at the institute the Abshires used.

In this case, the communitarian ethic does not apply as strongly in the sense that the people involved are not poor or marginalized. But the decisions parallel those faced by thousands of other families – all of whom, in communitarian terms, should be concerned about people who face similar situations. The story serves to highlight the difficulties faced by couples seeking in vitro fertilization, and it points appropriately to the ethical questions raised about embryo research as well as the benefits.

A second story, a magazine piece in Time (Gorman, 1995), uses an anecdote powerfully to portray the individual human dilemmas that the prospect of genetic testing can bring. Christine Gorman writes:

> Even with adequate information and advice, people can face excruciating dilemmas. Diana Lehman of Rockville, Maryland, knows she has a gene that causes colon cancer because research on her family helped scientists to identify the mutation. Anyone who bears this gene is 100% certain to develop the cancer, and while doctors are testing drug therapies, the only preventive treatment at present is surgery to remove the large intestines.
>
> Lehman made the hard choice to have the operation, but even then she could not stop worrying. She wondered if she had passed the genetic defect on to her teenage son and daughter. "It's going to eat at you, not knowing whether your children have the gene," she says. But, she asked herself, was it fair for her to decide whether they should learn their genetic makeup? In the end, Lehman concluded, the knowledge "helps [them] to prepare for the future." (Gorman, 1995, p. 60)

By describing the decision Diana Lehman faced about surgery and about testing for her children, Gorman helped to strengthen the individual level of the story, while sources elsewhere in the story represented institutional/organizational and professional concerns that took readers beyond the individual level. Her quandary, like the Abshires', involves a situation that mirrors those faced by many other individuals. Again, the anecdote helps to place it strongly in a web of relationships.

The third story, a Newsday column (Peracchio, 1997) opens with an extensive, well-crafted scenario about cloning a dying child:

> Suppose you are the loving parents of a treasured 5-year-old girl, the joy of your life, conceived after many frustrating years of childlessness. One day, as you are momentarily distracted, the little girl toddles away from your driveway and is struck by a car.
>
> She survives, brain-dead, on a respirator. Suppose you know that for a mere $200,000 a clinic in Singapore will take one of her living cells, extract the nucleus from one of her mother's eggs, fuse the two cells and implant the resulting embryo back into the mother's womb. Nine months later, an exact replica of your little girl, down to the finest strand of her hair, will be born.
>
> Would you do it?
>
> What if the cloned child, despite all your efforts, does not turn out to have as sunny a disposition as the original? She becomes an unbearable brat who, for inexplicable reasons, detests you.
>
> Could you live with the results? (Peracchio, 1997, p. A44)

The writer not only presents this scenario vividly but also develops it in a way that is not one-sided because it points to the possibility that suspected benefits will backfire. Even though this is not a real anecdote, it describes a situation that could happen to a real individual if human cloning technology were developed. In communitarian terms, it tells a story of an issue that raises profound implications for social justice in the sense that a cloned child could be the subject of discrimination and maltreatment, especially if the child did not turn out as hoped. Here, too, the web of relationships – first broken, then re-created but not with the same result – is powerfully presented. In addition, the anecdote implies the necessary relationship that must be established in this situation with another party: the clinic willing to do cloning.

These examples, while they cannot represent the broader body of journalistic anecdotes fully, show that anecdotes can do ethical good. They can highlight the difficulties that individuals face, place their challenges in the context of the web of relationships in which others struggle with these issues, and bring home issues of social justice. However, anecdotes also pose significant ethical dangers, as the following section will show.

The Ethical Perils of Anecdotes

The ethical complexity of the use of anecdotes is evident through the lenses of the three ethical perspectives used in this analysis. Craig's (1999a) framework, though underlining the importance of the individual level, presses journalists to go beyond it to examine issues at the organizational/institutional, professional, and social levels. Attention to only one level of analysis, in an in-depth piece or a body of coverage, is viewed as falling short of the moral obligation of journalists. In this light, anecdotes are morally a double-edged sword because, while they can bring attention to the plight of individuals in riveting fashion, and even place that plight in institutional, professional and social contexts, the attention remains on a representative – or perhaps unrepresentative – individual or family. Attention to a range of relevant parties at a variety of levels, both in the anecdote and elsewhere in the story, can mitigate the potential harm from this narrow focus. But as exemplification and framing studies have found, the anecdote has power to shape readers' or viewers' perception of the broader issue.

Communitarian media ethics (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993), with its deeply grounded concern for the good of society, calls into question the structure and choice of anecdotes. As already argued, this ethic supports the use of compelling individual cases to highlight broader social injustices. However, sloppy use of anecdotes can undermine an effort to portray the broader issue – not simply because of the natural tendency of anecdotes to highlight individuals, but also because the particular choice of individuals can skew understanding toward one side of a controversial issue, potentially resulting in neglect of social justice. It would distort the intent of communitarian ethics to use it to argue for formulaic balance in news coverage; it calls for more than "fair treatment of events" (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, p. 93). Consonant with Durham's (1998) notion of "strong objectivity," Christians, Ferre, and Fackler call for highlighting the perspectives of the marginalized and, where needed, giving those perspectives attention that is out of balance with the play given to the stories of the powerful. However, since communitarian ethics also implies a concern for faithful portrayal of the whole community, it implies a need to portray the breadth of the community's concern.

Gilligan's (1982) ethic highlighting relationships and responsibilities also calls for careful attention to what anecdotes are chosen and what they portray. Her ethic implies a need for accurate understanding of responsibilities of individuals in the broader context of society, so that the web of relationships and people's responsibilities within them is rightly understood. Like Craig's (1999a) and Christians, Ferre, and Fackler's (1993) perspectives, it does not imply that anecdotes should be banned from journalism. They do, as already argued, have the power to do ethical good. But like these other perspectives, it suggests that when anecdotes are used, they must be crafted in ways that place the individuals they portray in the broader context of the issues being discussed.

As with the promise of anecdotes, their potential dangers can be illustrated by examination of some anecdotes in stories about medical, scientific, and ethical controversies.

The stories already examined above, while showing the promise of anecdotes, also underline the justifiable ethical concerns about their use. Especially in television, with its ability to use emotional visuals, the use of anecdotes may overshadow broader issues – an ethical problem from the vantage point of the perspectives used in this analysis. Strait's (1994) anecdote about the Abshire family used a still portrait of their now-deceased child Meaghan and shots of dressed-up baby Brittany, who was born after tests of other embryos for genetic defects and the use of in vitro fertilization. The story also used as sources two doctors, a Catholic leader critical of embryo research, and a member of a National Institutes of Health panel on human embryo research. This sourcing shows that Strait was seeking to place the issue in broader organizational, professional, and social context. But shots of a child who died and a cute, living baby may overshadow the discussion of the broader context.

A study using TV news stories (Aust and Zillmann, 1997) found that exemplification using emotional victims fostered perceptions that problems were more severe than when unemotional or no victim exemplification was used. This finding suggests that emotional anecdotes such as Strait's may skew viewers' perceptions of an issue such as human embryo research. And in ethical terms, an emotional anecdote that implies ethical benefits from embryo research but does not address opponents' ethical concerns leaves viewers without the entire picture of the issue.

Even in magazines and newspapers, which depend less on powerful visuals, the word pictures of anecdotes can draw attention away from broader organizational, professional, and institutional issues and skew understanding and opinion toward one side of a controversial issue. Gorman's (1995) Time story did a good job of discussing legal and policy implications of the controversy over embryo research, and used a variety of sources pointing to issues beyond the individual level. However, the anecdotes – the one about Diana Lehman's colon cancer gene and three others – still may leave the strongest impression on empathetic readers. Peracchio, whose Newsday column (1997) opened with a hypothetical anecdote, crafted this tale with great emotional power, referring to the death of "a treasured 5-year-old girl" and the birth of a cloned child who "becomes an unbearable brat." To his credit, he does not sugarcoat the possible results of human cloning, but the anecdote – which opens the column – is likely to linger more in the minds of readers than what they may hear in his story or elsewhere about the legal and ethical status of cloning.

The danger of skewing perception of the broader social issue is particularly evident in television coverage of another topic: physician-assisted suicide. The portrayal of suffering people, though important, also serves to distort consideration of the broader issue of the ethics of this practice. This point is evident in an NBC Nightly News story reported by Mike Boettcher (1997). After anchor Brian Williams' introduction, Boettcher opens his reporting with this anecdote:

> MIKE BOETTCHER reporting: No matter what Barbara Oskamp does, no matter how simple the act, the terminally ill woman writes it down [video shows list of simple things she must write down to remember], otherwise she'll forget when she takes a bath, when she washes clothes. A brain tumor slowly is taking her memory as it takes her life, and she wants the option to end her suffering before the pain becomes unbearable [close-up of her]. She supports Oregon's Death With Dignity Act, the only assisted suicide law in the nation.

> Ms. BARBARA OSKAMP: I don't know I'd be brave enough to actually do it. But the feeling that I had a choice, if the pain, maybe, was too awful, just as I said before, gave me a feeling of relief. (Boettcher, 1997)

Oskamp's plight is heart-rending, and it should evoke sympathy from the audience because she is suffering. However, the very power of this portrayal of suffering obscures the fact that in many cases, better pain management by physicians can make assisted suicide seem less attractive or necessary. This point is made – both through professional sourcing and an anecdote – in another TV story on assisted suicide, for CBS (Stewart, 1997). But a broader examination of network TV coverage of assisted suicide from 1997 to April 1999 shows that the CBS story was a rarity: anecdotes were heavily skewed toward portrayals that supported assisted suicide. In fact, Oskamp herself appeared in at least three stories on two networks.

This attention to individuals in ways that supported assisted suicide, aside from simply drawing attention to individuals, implies that assisted suicide must be an ethical good, when in reality it raises serious ethical questions. The prevalence of this kind of anecdote distorts understanding of what social justice, a concern of communitarian media ethics (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993), demands. While a focus on these kinds of anecdotes appears to highlight concerns of marginalized people, it also neglects the danger that social acceptance of assisted suicide poses for people with disabilities and terminally ill individuals who cannot pay for insurance. This emphasis also distorts the portrayal of the responsibilities of terminally ill people and their families in their relationships with one another – thus falling short ethically from Gilligan's (1982) perspective.[3]

As with coverage of physician-assisted suicide, the ethical problems of using anecdotes are strongly evident in coverage of health maintenance organizations. HMOs have become controversial in recent years because of their efforts to control costs and the impact that these cost controls have on patients. An examination of network TV coverage of the practices of HMOs in 1997, at a time when HMOs were drawing increasing public attention, shows that many of the stories used anecdotes that were sympathetic to the difficulties patients faced in dealing with the fallout of HMO cost controls and related issues.

A CBS story reported by Frank Currier (1997) focused on the Kaiser Permanente HMO's problems in Texas, where it faced possible revocation of its license amid accusations of cost-cutting that was too aggressive. Currier used this anecdote early in the story:

> Ms. KAREN SPRINGER: I don't remember anybody saying, "I'm sorry."
>
> CURRIER: Karen Springer of Wills Point, Texas, filed a medical malpractice suit against Kaiser.
>
> Ms. SPRINGER: They killed my husband, that's what I'm saying. They took--took--took my husband's life. They made a mistake with what they were doing. [close-up of face]
>
> CURRIER: Her husband Bobby, 54, and the mayor of Wills Point, died after surgeons performing an angiogram accidentally punctured the main artery to his heart. [couple shown in photo]
>
> Ms. SPRINGER: They made an error. They took my husband's life by a doctor that evidently did not know what he was doing or was in a hurry. (Currier, 1997)

This portrayal reflects a tragic situation just as the portrayal of Barbara Oskamp's illness did. It does ethical good by drawing attention even to the plight of this single couple since what happened to them is part of broader accusations against Kaiser. The anecdote, therefore, is in keeping with the Craig (1999a) framework in that it does powerfully portray the individual level, as well as point to the organizational/institutional and professional ones. However, it may draw attention away from the social level, placing it in question in light of Craig's call for attention to that level – and the related concerns implied by Christians, Ferre, and Fackler (1993) and Gilligan (1982). It is an economic reality that medical costs have to be controlled. Because of the serious nature of medical problems, how costs are to be controlled becomes a profound issue of social ethics. Even though the story pointed to the broader issue of cost-cutting, it did not address the fact that some kind of lid has to be placed on health care costs because of limited medical and financial resources. A relatively brief story such as Currier's (1997) cannot address this issue in depth, but a broader piece on HMOs could.

The danger of neglecting social ethics that this story highlights is echoed in Deni Elliott's (1991) critical analysis of news coverage of an organ transplant case that received intense media attention in Maine. "A child in need of community assistance so that she can get life-saving medical treatment is not episodic, it is a vivid symptom of a health care system in need of attention," Elliott argued (p. 158). But the media outlets covering the case of Norma Lynn neglected the broader picture.

Daniel Callahan, a medical ethicist, sees the use of anecdotes as hindering consideration of broader resource questions. A comment he made on use of anecdotes in the assisted-suicide debate is cautionary not only for that topic but for HMO coverage and portrayal of other topics that involve social ethics: "I'm endlessly on programs with people who tell these sad stories, and it's very hard to talk about the larger social dangers of physician-assisted suicide when somebody's got a sad story" (personal communication, May 1997). The discussion of anecdotes in this section underlines this argument that anecdotes can draw attention away from broader consideration of social-level concerns such as just treatment of the terminally ill and just allocation of health care resources.

Recommendations for Journalists on Use of Anecdotes

The ethical pros and cons of using anecdotes, as seen from three theoretical vantage points (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993; Craig, 1999a; Gilligan, 1982), point to a need for careful consideration of how and when anecdotes are to be used in news stories. This section will point to ways in which journalists can think more critically in choosing anecdotes, as well as suggest an approach that adapts the good points of anecdotes but avoids some of their liabilities.

The suggestions for more critical thinking about choice of anecdotes arise out of an application of David Boeyink's (1992) discussion of use of the method of casuistry in journalists' ethical decision-making. Casuists consider comparison of cases to be highly important in determining whether an action is morally justifiable. The anchor for the comparison and judgment is a paradigm case (or cases), in which the decision made is morally unambiguous (Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988; Boeyink, 1992).[4] In classical Jesuit casuistry, such a case might have involved a clear breach of the biblical command against killing (Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988, p. 252). In terms of journalism ethics, it might mean taking an expensive gift from a news source -- or, at the ethical end of the spectrum, accepting a free cup of coffee (Boeyink, 1992, p. 112). In either realm of decision-making, choices are made in more ambiguous cases by comparing them with such clear-cut cases. The choice of paradigm case thus becomes critical to the decision-maker's understanding of the ethical issues at hand.

In situations in which reporters are striving to portray the ethical dimension of a news story, the notion of a paradigm case could be applied in two senses: anecdotes (cases) could be chosen to represent the possible extremes (the clearly ethical and the clearly unethical), or -- in a twist on the notion of paradigm case -- an anecdote could be chosen to represent the most morally ambiguous situation (as perceived in relationship to clear-cut cases). Without referring to casuistry, reporters already seek to choose anecdotes that represent the ethical topics they are covering, and they focus on cases that highlight the difficult choices people face. However, the previous analysis in this essay suggests that anecdotes could be used more appropriately if more conscious attention were given to how they represent the ethical issues in the situation being covered.

Two examples using topics discussed above will suggest more concretely how this adaptation of the use of casuistry could refine journalists' choices of anecdotes:

1. Use of two anecdotes from "ethical extremes": a story on physician-assisted suicide could use one anecdote that reflects a situation in which both proponents and opponents would see assisted suicide as ethically unsupportable – such as the case of a person in chronic pain but still functioning in his family life and career – and one in which they would come closest to agreeing that it was supportable – such as the case of a person in constant, terrible pain even with the aid of strong painkillers. The writer or TV reporter using this approach need not ignore the ethical concerns of opponents who would object even in this case, but by using this kind of template for choosing anecdotes, the reporter would reflect the breadth of viewpoints more fully. This might correspond to what the instincts of good journalists would demand even without a formal ethical reason, but this recommendation might spur the thinking of others toward more careful portrayals.

This suggestion is not meant to imply that balance of ethical viewpoints should be the norm for all ethics coverage. In fact, Craig has argued elsewhere (2002) that writing which makes explicit a journalist's ethical views may do more for readers' understanding than ethical neutrality. But this suggestion retains the notion that audience understanding is enhanced by exposure to more than one viewpoint.

2. Use of one anecdote with maximum moral ambiguity: a story about the practices of health maintenance organizations could use one anecdote that reflected the difficulty of moral choices involved by showing both ethical and unethical sides of HMOs. For example, an anecdote that showed how a woman had benefited from HMO cost-cutting by paying less in insurance premiums than under conventional medical insurance, but then had been denied payment for a cancer treatment – the only effective one for her kind of cancer – because the treatment was not widely enough used yet. The two sides in this case each individually represent clear-cut cases, but combined in one situation they reflect the ethical tension that arises in connection with HMOs.

The anecdote could even be hypothetical like the one Peracchio used in his Newsday column (1997) on cloning, but journalists would need to exercise great care in crafting hypothethical anecdotes – using them only when real ones are not available for the topic (true for human cloning since it had not happened yet) and doing enough interviewing and other research to ensure that the scenario expresses a situation that could actually happen.

The "maximum moral ambiguity" approach is similar to what many reporters probably do intuitively to portray the complexity of a topic. But again, offering this as a stated recommendation on use of anecdotes may help foster more exacting choices.

Although this application of casuistry applies most directly to stories with a clear ethical dimension – such as stories on bioethical topics, or controversial practices in business or government -- it also has implications for stories where that dimension may not be as prominent. Use of anecdotes reflecting extremes of the positive or negative impact from a public issue – such as a city council decision on subdivision zoning – would help to paint a broad picture for readers or viewers. Similarly, an anecdote that reflected the most mixed impact would, in a different way, represent the issue as more than one-sided.

In addition to applying the notion of casuistry in these ways to the choice of anecdotes, journalists can pursue another way to personalize topics without drawing too much attention away from the broadest dimension of the topics or distorting the big picture. This approach involves accompanying a broad issue piece in a newspaper or magazine – or an in-depth TV package -- with two or three sidebars, each centered on how the issue is playing out in the life of an individual or family (for example, three stories, each on how a different family is being affected by HMOs). This adapts the idea of anecdotes – personal stories – by expanding it to full sidebars. This practice, too, is not an alien one for journalists, but the use of more than one person-centered sidebar would broaden reader or viewer understanding of the impact of the issue beyond what might be gained from a single sidebar.[5] In addition, applying the discussion of casuistry above to the choice of these "super-anecdotes" – by using the notions of ethical extremes and maximum moral ambiguity -- could help make journalistic portrayals using this form more ethically balanced.

These sidebars could be written in third person like conventional news stories, with the sources cited, or they could be first-person pieces by the individuals themselves. In either case, they are consistent in particular with Gilligan's (1982) emphasis on the importance of relationships and voice. This approach can address the relationship dimension better than conventional anecdotes by shedding more detailed light on individuals and how they are wrestling through an issue such as genetic testing for a disease that runs in the family.

It is unrealistic to expect journalists to avoid using anecdotes, given their potential power to get the attention of readers and viewers. It is also inappropriate since anecdotes do have a positive side ethically. However, given the liabilities connected with anecdotes, it is wise not to use them automatically as leads of long issue pieces, especially since many readers will not finish the story and therefore may miss some of the broader context. It also may be ethically constructive at times to use examples that are not heavily emotional. Most important, as the three theoretical perspectives applied here suggest, use and choice of anecdotes should be evaluated in light of the need to portray topics in their broader relational and social contexts as well as at the level of individuals.

Conclusion

This essay has pointed out the ethical benefits and difficulties that arise from use of anecdotes in news coverage – both in stories that themselves portray ethical issues and those that address topics in other ways. This argument, made on ethical grounds and illustrated with anecdotes from news coverage, complements the findings of exemplification and framing research by making an ethical, rather than a broad empirical, case for the problems that anecdotes pose for audiences. It points to the need for more careful choices in the use of anecdotes and for approaches that draw out the stories of individuals more effectively than conventional anecdotes. Research growing out of this analysis could provide ethical evaluation of the use of anecdotes in larger sets of stories on a variety of topics, with an eye to how well the stories address issues at the individual, organizational/institutional, professional, and social levels (Craig, 1999a). This kind of research would further the kind of critical analysis that can help bring readers and viewers stories that have both a powerful personal dimension and the context of social meaning.

---

[1] Two of the examples, on human embryo research and genetic testing, are discussed in the author's dissertation (Craig, 1997). The others, from the author's ongoing research, have not been discussed in previous studies.

[2] Notes in brackets about visuals, in this and other TV stories in this analysis, were added by the author based on viewing of transcripts from the Vanderbilt University Television News Archive.

[3] Lauffer (2000), in a study of Michigan newspapers' framing of assisted suicide, offers a somewhat different perspective on the impact of emphasizing individual cases. She argues that this emphasis "deflected the framing from blaming social conditions to blaming individuals and groups. It also perpetuated stereotypical portrayals of the miserable, pitiful lives of dependence lived by individuals with terminal illnesses" (p. 211). Her argument about blaming individuals echoes Iyengar's (1991) finding about the impact of framing focused on individuals and events.

[4] Boeyink (1992) draws on the discussion of casuistry in Jonsen and Toulmin (1988) while noting that "definitions of casuistry have varied widely" (Boeyink, 1992, p. 112).

[5] This recommendation is modified and refined from recommendations in Craig (1997, 1999b) offered for journalists covering ethics.

References

Aust, C. F., & Zillmann, D. (1996). Effects of victim exemplification in television news on viewer perception of social issues. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 73, 787-803.

Boettcher, M. (1997). Supreme Court decision on assisted suicide makes emotional debate in Oregon even more volatile. In NBC nightly news. National Broadcasting Company. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Boeyink, D. E. (1992). Casuistry: A case-based method for journalists. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 7, 107-120.

Christians, C. G., Ferre, J. P., & Fackler, P. M. (1993). Good news: Social ethics and the press. New York: Oxford University Press.

Craig, D. (1997). Covering the ethics angle: Toward a method to evaluate and improve how journalists portray the ethical dimension of professions and society. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia.

Craig, D. A. (1999a). A framework for evaluating coverage of ethics in professions and society. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 14, 16-27.

Craig, D. A. (1999b). Conquering complexity: Barriers to better news coverage of ethics and recommendations for improvement. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Crystal City, VA.

Craig, D. A. (2000a, August). Covering the ethics of death: An exploration of three model approaches. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Phoenix, AZ.

Craig, D. A. (2000b). Ethical language and themes in news coverage of genetic testing. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 77, 160-174.

Craig, D. A. (2002). Covering ethics through analysis and commentary: A case study. Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 17, 53-68.

Craig, D. A., & Pantic, V. (2001). The role of questions in TV news coverage of the ethics of cloning. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC.

Currier, F. (1997, April 18). Kaiser Permanente faces possible revocation of license in Texas due to wrongful death lawsuits. In CBS evening news. Burrelle's Information Services. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Durham, M. G. (1998). On the relevance of standpoint epistemology to the practice of journalism: The case for "strong objectivity." Communication Theory, 8, 117-140.

Elliott, D. (1991). A case of need: Media coverage of organ transplants. In L. Wilkins & P. Patterson (Eds.), Risky business: Communicating issues of science, risk, and public policy (pp. 151-158). New York: Greenwood Press.

Gibson, R., & Zillmann, D. (1994). Exaggerated versus representative exemplification in news reports. Communication Research, 21, 603, 22+. Retrieved March 30, 2002, from Academic Search Elite on-line database.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gorman, C. (1995, April 10). The doctor's crystal ball. Time, p. 60. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Iyengar, S. (1991). Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jonsen, A. R., & Toulmin, S. (1988). The abuse of casuistry: A history of moral reasoning. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lauffer, K. A. (2000). Defining and dramatizing death: A framing analysis of newspaper coverage of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia in selected Michigan newspapers from 1996 to 1999. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida.

Peracchio, A. (1997, February 27). Cloning science could lead us to split heirs. Newsday, p. A44. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Price, V., Tewksbury, D., & Powers, E. (1997). Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers' cognitive responses. Communication Research, 24, 481-506.

Stewart, J. (1997, January 7). Cancer patients who face issue of doctor-assisted suicide. CBS evening news. Burrelle's Information Services. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Strait, G. (1994, September 27). American agenda – embryo research. In ABC world news tonight. American Broadcasting Companies. Retrieved from LEXIS-NEXIS on-line database.

Valkenburg, P. M., Semetko, H. A., & de Vreese, C. H. (1999). The effects of news frames on readers' thoughts and recall. Communication Research, 26, 550-569.

Zillmann, D., & Brosius, H.-B. (2000). Exemplification in communication: The influence of case reports on the perception of issues. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Zillmann, D., Gibson, R., Sundar, S. S., & Perkins, J. W., Jr. (1996). Effects of exemplification in news reports on the perception of social issues. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 73, 427-444.

Generation Y's Ethical Judgments of Sexual and Fear Appeals in Print Advertising

Jeffrey J. Maciejewski, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
Creighton University

Creighton University
Hitchcock Communication Arts Bldg. 209B
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178
Office: (402)280-4061
Home: (402)561-6547
E-mail: jeffm@creighton.edu

Media Ethics Division

Today's young adults—otherwise known as Generation Y (Gen Y)—may perhaps be the closest we have to being a truly unique generation. Not only is Gen Y believed by many to be one of the largest generations ever, possessing significant spending power (Janoff 1999), it just so happens to be very different, psychographically, from its forebears—ostensibly making it the next big generation for marketers and advertisers to hone-in on. It has been estimated that there will be more than 31 million members of Gen Y by 2005, comprising more than 10 percent of the U.S. population. But if you add in today's 6- to 17-year-olds in this group, as demographers have done, you end up with a generation of 60 million, compared to 72 million Baby Boomers. Not only are they large in size, but they possess dizzying spending power. According to the firm Teen Research Unlimited (Rushkopf 2001), in 2000 U.S. teens spent an estimated $105 billion and influenced their parents to spend an additional $48 billion. So they're big and they're big spenders—yet despite their enormous size and impressive purchasing power, little attention has been paid to the moral bearings of this group. Studying this group's ethics might net useful insight into this huge, media-savvy generation.

Investigating Ethical Judgments of Advertising

Numerous studies have investigated consumers' ethical assessments of advertising. Researchers have studied consumers' moral appraisals of wartime ads depicting combat (Tansey, Hyman and Brown 1992), the relationship between product knowledge and consumers' ethical judgments of ads (citation withheld pending review), consumers' moral appraisals of advertising in general (Triff, Benningfield and Murphy 1987), the ethics of advertising to children and alcoholic beverage ads (Treise, Weigold, Conna, and Garrison 1994), the ethics of political commercials (Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy 1994), racial stereotyping in advertising (Treise et al. 1994), the ethics of sexual appeals in advertising (LaTour and Henthorne 1994; LaTour, Pitts and Snook-Luther 1990; Treise et al. 1994), and consumer ethical evaluations of fear appeals in ads (Treise et al. 1994). Still others have investigated *how* individuals make ethical decisions (e.g., Pitts, Wong and Whalen 1991; Tucker and Pratt 1993; Whalen, Pitts and Wong 1991), the overall ethical views of consumers in general (Vitell and Muncy 1992) and the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers (Vitell, Lumpkin and Rawwas 1991).

Although Wolburg and Pokrywczynski (2001) investigated Gen Y college students' assessments of the informativeness of advertising, no studies have studied the ethical beliefs of this influential demographic. Such a focus may provide valuable insight into this group for advertisers and academicians alike given the differences between Gen Y and previous generations. These differences may prompt advertisers to adopt new selling strategies. For example, Wolburg and Pokrywczynski (2001) report that Gen Yers have grown up in a more media-saturated, brand-conscious world than their parents and thus respond to ads differently. They tend to reject traditional message strategies, requiring specific creative approaches (Neuborne and Kerwin 1999; Tiezen 1996). Advertisers that fail to address Gen Y on their level may suffer the consequences: brands that miss the mark may not recover (Neuborne and Kerwin 1999).

Gen Yers are reported to possess other characteristics that distinguish them from other demographic groups. Generally, young people (i.e., individuals between the ages of 18 and 34) have reported greater liking of advertisements compared to adults and are less often offended, insulted and misled by advertising (Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner 1998). More specifically, members of Gen Y are reported to be extremely literate (Thau 1996), more racially and ethnically diverse (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001) and less cynical, more optimistic, more idealistic, more inclined to value tradition, and more similar to Baby Boomers than Generation Xers (Stapinski 1999). Gen Y is also expected to be more of an "activist group" (Kapner 1997), which would appear to coincide with Witt's (1998) observation that teens believe that society is negatively affected by a lack of morality or ethics. Given their size, the economic power they wield, and the profound psychographic differences between Gen Y and other demographic groups, it would follow that gaining an understanding of how Gen Y morally appraises advertising would prove to be particularly insightful.

It should be noted that researchers have struggled to define the individuals that comprise Gen Y. Surveying 19 separate articles, Wolburg and Pokrywczynski (2001) noted wide disagreement among analysts on the age range of Gen Y. While some preferred to categorize the demographic as consisting of individuals between 6 and 21 years-old, others believed them to be between 6 to 23 years-old, 12 to 19 years-old, and 18 to 24 years-old. This study, like that of Wolburg and Pokrwyczynski (2001), preferred to define the age range of Gen Y as being between 18 and 24 years of age.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the moral views toward advertising among members of Gen Y in order to better understand the ethical bearings of this large and economically-influential demographic group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical Evaluations of Advertising

Researchers have studied the ethical evaluations of individuals concerning the use of sexual appeals and fear appeals in advertising, the ethics of advertisers, and advertising practices. In a survey of 100 consumers (their ages were not reported) Triff et al. (1987) found that 70 percent of respondents felt that advertising directed toward children was manipulative. They also found that 60 percent of all respondents believed that alcoholic beverage advertising glamorizes drinking alcohol and hides the dangers associated with it. Last the authors revealed that 43 percent of those surveyed felt that political advertising misrepresented the political candidates they publicized.

In their study of 124 adult individuals ranging in age from 20- to 46-years old, Tansey, Hyman and Brown (1992) found that moral appraisals of ads depicting combat varied based on the purpose of particular ads. For example, the authors reported that the use of ads depicting combat by the Red Cross was the most ethical; the use of similar ads to recruit men for military service was rated the second most ethical; and the use of ads depicting combat by private companies was rated the least ethical.

Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1994) surveyed 201 undergraduate college students (their ages were not revealed) for their ethical judgments of political television commercials. The authors found that high ethical evaluations were associated with liking positive messages that stressed public issues as opposed to those that stressed opponent characteristics. Moreover, respondents' beliefs that particular ads were ethical or unethical were strongly correlated with their attitudes toward the ads.

Numerous other articles, while not measuring individuals' ethical evaluations of ads, have addressed the ethics of advertising in general and the ethical problems of its practitioners (e.g., Greyser 1972; Holbrook 1987; Hung and Rice 1990; Hunt and Chonko 1987; Hyman and Tansey 1990; James, Pratt and Smith 1994; Pollay 1987).

The Influence of Ethical Ideologies: The Multidimensional Ethics Scale

Some researchers have found that consumers' ethical appraisals of advertising differed based on their individual ethical ideologies—their ethical predispositions (or adherence to universal moral rules) served as significant predictors of their ethical evaluations of advertising. In their study, LaTour and Henthorne (1994) utilized the Multidimensional Ethics Scale (MES) developed by Reidenbach and Robin (1990) as a predictor of response. The MES posits that, when making ethical judgments, individuals tend to gravitate toward one of three dimensions when making moral judgments: a "moral equity dimension," a "relativism dimension," and a "contractualism dimension." Decisions with a foundation in moral equity are "evaluated essentially in terms of their inherent fairness, justice, goodness, and rightness" (Reidenbach and Robin 1990, pp. 645-646). Individuals who espouse the relativistic dimension seem "to be more concerned with the guidelines, requirements, and parameters inherent in the social/cultural system than with individual considerations" (Reidenbach and Robin 1990, p. 646). The contractualism dimension is one in which "implied obligation, contracts, duties, and rules are present" (Reidenbach and Robin 1990, p. 646).

LaTour and Henthorne (1994) employed the MES in their study of ethical ideologies and the influence of moral judgments in attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitude toward the brand (A_b) and purchase intention (PI). In a study of 199 consumers (with an average age of 34.3 years; the authors did not provide specific age data) exposed to an ad stimulus using a "mild sexual appeal" and a stimulus featuring an "overt sexual appeal," the authors found that individuals reflecting moral equity and relativistic dimensions regarded the overt sexual appeal ad as being less acceptable than the mild sexual appeal ad. LaTour and Henthorne (1994, p. 88) also reported that "overall, men had a more favorable response in terms of A_{ad} and that the mild sexual appeal ad was more affable." Additionally, the authors found that women in the strong overt sexual appeal ad group had the most negative A_{ad}, and that the mild sexual appeal ad was evaluated more favorably—the group seeing that ad indicated a more positive brand attitude and a stronger level of PI. Last, the study revealed that individuals with more favorable ethical evaluations of the ads posted more positive A_{ad}, A_b and PI scores.

An Alternative to the MES: The EPQ

Treise et al. (1994) and Vitell et al. (1991) on the other hand, utilized the Ethical Position Questionnaire (EPQ), developed and later validated by Forsyth (1980, 1992) to measure consumer ethical ideologies. Like the MES, the EPQ posits that individuals adhere to certain ethical ideologies when making moral judgments. The EPQ, however, is characterized by two dimensions: "relativism" and "idealism." Relativism is defined as "the extent to which the individual rejects universal moral rules" (Forsyth 1980, p. 175). Conversely, idealism describes a philosophy wherein "individuals idealistically assume that desirable consequences can, with the 'right' action, always be obtained" (Forsyth 1980, p. 176). According to Forsyth (1980), it is possible for individuals to possess different levels of relativism and idealism, being either "high" or "low" in each, resulting in a 2X2 taxonomy (see Figure 1, page 8).

Treise et al. (1994) found a number of statiscally-significant correlations between levels of relativism and idealism and subsequent moral appraisals of advertising. In their study of 292 individuals ranging in age from 18 to 60 plus years, the authors found that, compared to high relativists, low relativists were more likely to view as unethical children's tie-in programs, candy and gum ads, and alcohol, cigarette and lottery ads targeted to minorities. Low relativists were also more likely to agree that fear appeals for acne products, breath mints and radon detectors were objectionable. High relativists, on the other hand, believed that it was unethical for ads to encourage parents to look for warning signs of drug use, and unethical for ads to warn about the dangers of using crack cocaine. Treise et al. (1994, p. 67) concluded that "high relativists show[ed] greater tolerance for many controversial advertising practices, except when advertisers use messages that attempt to change controversial or dangerous behaviors. Perhaps high relativists perceive[d] that advertising [was] overstepping its 'proper' role as a tool of selling and is instead being preachy or moralizing when it deals with drug use." Conversely, individuals measuring high in idealism "were more likely to object to cartoon tie-ins, candy and gum ads directed at children … [in addition to] cigarette (but not alcohol) ads targeting inner city minorities."

Figure 1
Forsyth's (1980) Ethical Taxonomy

		Relativism	
		Low	High
Idealism	Low	Exceptionist	Subjectivist (Machiavellian)
	High	Absolutist	Situationist

Other researchers have profitably used the EPQ to study the ethical views of consumers. While they did not measure ethical evaluations of advertising, Vitell et al. (1991) used the EPQ to investigate the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers. Among 394 individuals between the ages of 60 and 79 years-old, the authors found that absolutism was the most predominant ethical ideology, followed by situationism, subjectivism, and exceptionism, respectively. Additionally, Vitell et al. (1991, p. 372) found that "elderly consumers [were] more Machiavellian than the general population as reported in previous research." They also found that "elderly consumers, while generally being more ethical than younger consumers, [were] quite diverse in terms of their ethical beliefs" (Vitell et al. 1991, p. 373).

[citation withheld pending review] (2000) used the EPQ in an effort to probe a possible link between consumers' level of knowledge about a product and ethical evaluations of ads for the product. In his study, college students (n=400) between the ages of 17 and 44 were first measured for their levels of relativism and idealism, then exposed to and asked to ethically judge two ad stimuli—one ad comprised of largely emotional content and an ad featuring rational content (cf. Holbrook 1987; Pollay 1986). Respondents were then measured for their level of knowledge about the product depicted in the stimuli. The usefulness of EPQ in predicting ethical appraisals was clearly evident in moral assessments of the emotional ad, where high idealists believed that the emotional ad was unethical, more so than low idealists and high relativists. Moreover, the study found level of product knowledge moderated the ethical judgments of some individuals in some circumstances: low relativists with high knowledge tended to evaluate the emotional ad more negatively than low relativists with low levels of product knowledge.

In sum, although researchers have noted that the MES and EPQ have been used to measure the espousing of similar moral philosophies, the literature has appeared to favor the EPQ (cf. Tansey, Brown, Hyman, and Dawson 1994). Indeed, Skipper and Hyman (1993), have suggested that since it mixes deontological and teleological moral philosophies, the MES is problematic. Favoring the EPQ, Treise et al. (1994, p. 67) concluded that "The EPQ proved quite effective in distinguishing differences of opinion on advertising controversies." Moreover, the EPQ has been noted has having the benefit of adequate internal consistency and reliability over time (Forsyth 1980, 1992). For these reasons, the EPQ was chosen as a valid measure of respondent ethical ideology in this study (see Appendix A, pp. 35-37).

THE PRESENT STUDY

What are Gen Yers' Moral Appraisals of Advertising?

This study was designed to serve as an initial investigation into the moral perceptions of advertising among members of Gen Y. The primary goal of the study was to assess how this demographic morally appraises the use of sexual appeals, fear appeals and puffery in advertising. Sexual appeals and fear appeals were chosen as the topic for this study based on their ubiquity in print advertising (Turley and Kelley 1997) and for their importance as topics for research according to academicians (Hyman, Tansey and Clark 1994). Puffery was included as a subject for analysis in this study, since researchers have likened it to deception (Preston 1994) and since academicians have indicated that the use of deception in advertising is *the* most important topic for advertising ethics researchers to study (Hyman et al. 1994).

The primary research question to be answered by this study was: *What are Gen Yers' moral appraisals of advertising, in particular their views on the use of sexual and fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims in ads*?

To begin, the study sought to define what constitutes a sexual appeal, a fear appeal and puffery. Gould (1994, p. 74) has reported that "Sexual appeals used in ads are of many types and consist of a variety of elements. They are often grounded in visual elements, such as attractive models, and may portray varying degrees of nudity and suggestiveness … [and] may also include suggestive verbal elements, such as suggestive music and even smells in 'scent strip' advertising." LaTour and Henthorne (1994, p. 82) have concurred, noting what constitutes a sexual appeal may be viewed as a narrow to broad continuum. "The narrow range of the continuum encompasses material that shows nudity or portrayals of the sex act itself. In contrast, the broad range of the continuum encompasses material that, while not overtly sexually explicit, some individuals may find sexually stimulating (e.g., attractive, 'sexy' dressed couples in subtle but sensual poses)." In order to avoid theoretical problems relating to the distinction between "obscenity and indecency" in sexual appeals noted by Gould (1994), the present study chose to focus its attention on the broader definition of sexual appeal, in the particular the use of sexy models and suggestive verbal elements in advertising.

Fear appeals have benefited from the same theoretical analyses that have been given to sexual appeals. Henthorne, LaTour and Nataraajan (1993, p. 59) reported that "fear appeals [are] grounded in the belief that some form of arousal is necessary for individual change to occur." Since the way people respond to fear is learned, marketers often rely on such appeals to stimulate interest in products or services (LaTour and Zahra 1989). Fear appeals are said to rely on three different steps: "The first involves the creation of a fearful situation designed to activate a person's sense of risk … In the second phase of employing a fear appeal, the danger is depicted to be serious enough to warrant attention … In the third phase, a solution is provided as a means of fear reduction. The appeal is often coupled with assurances of 'security from fear' in order to entice potential customers to pursue the suggested action" (LaTour and Zahra 1989, pp. 61-63). Beyond this three-step process, researchers have sought a distinction between what is generally referred to as "fear appeals" in the literature and the actual fear arousal that individuals may experience. LaTour and Rotfeld (1997, p. 46) clarify the definition, noting that "A threat is an appeal *to* fear, a communication stimulus that *attempts* to evoke fear response by showing some type of outcome that the audience (it is hoped) wants to avoid."

In contrast to sexual and fear appeals, puffery has been defined as the use of hyperbole, exaggeration or flowery language in advertising. Preston (1994, p. 23) has described puffery as "soft core deception," praising "a product or service with subjective opinions, superlatives, or exaggerations, vaguely and generally, stating no specific facts." Puffery may be characterized as consisting of either "selective facts" or "non-facts" (Preston 1994). Selective facts are chosen by the advertiser and are intentionally vague or incomplete, such as the previously ubiquitous "Coke is it." Similarly, non-facts consist of purely subjective comments about products in which no objective information is used to back up the claim, such as "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco."

Thus, this study was designed to assess Gen Yers' ethical assessments of sexual and fear appeals and puffery used in advertising and how these views might differ based on respondents' ethical ideologies. It must be stressed, however, that this study was not designed to replicate past research with a more narrow, demographically-specific sample. The study did focus on many of the same dimensions measured in previous research including ethical evaluations of the use of sexually-suggestive models (LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Treise et al. 1994) and the use of fear appeals (Treise et al. 1994). However, it should be noted that Treise et al. (1994) did not use advertising stimuli in their study—they measured ethical perceptions of advertising "practices" posited to respondents in written form. Although LaTour and Henthorne (1994) *did* use advertising stimuli, they investigated correlations between response and ethical ideology using a different measure of ethical ideology than Treise et al., the MES (Reidenbach and Robin 1990).

Hypotheses

Forsyth (1980) has noted that some individuals may be ethical relativists and as such, may be less rule-oriented than ethical idealists—they are either Situationists or Subjectivists. Situationists, Forsyth noted (1992, p. 464) believe "that an action, to be moral, must be appropriate given the particular content; not necessarily good or right, but be 'fitting.'" Forsyth (1992, p. 465) has further noted that "Subjectivists, like Situationists, reject moral rules … [they believe that] individualistic judgments cannot be made on the basis of moral absolutes or the extent to which the action benefits others …"

Inasmuch as "Those who [view] moral principles as relative and context-bound [may tend] to grant broader latitude to advertisers" (Treise et al. 1994, p. 67), it follows that individuals with less adherence to universal moral principles may render more positive perceptions of emotional appeals. If so, individuals measuring high in relativism may be more likely to rate emotional appeals as being ethical than would rule-bound individuals measuring high in idealism.

Treise et al. (1994) and LaTour and Henthorne (1994) confirmed the possibility: individuals that were rated as being ethical relativists posted more favorable ethical evaluations of sexual content in advertising than did others (LaTour and Henthorne 1994). Similarly, ethical relativists have reported more favorable ethical evaluations of fear appeals in advertising than ethical idealists (Treise et al. 1994)[1]. Given these findings, and since it has not been determined in the literature that teens *do not* adhere to the EPQ's ideologies, the following hypotheses were proposed:

---

[1] With particular regard to the EPQ, it should be noted that Treise et al. (1994) only classified respondents as being relativistic or idealistic; they did not account for varying levels of relativism and idealism among respondents.

H_1: Subjectivists will rate the use of a sexual appeal as being more ethical than will Absolutists.

H_2: Subjectivists will rate the use of a fear appeal as being more ethical than will Absolutists.

H_3: Subjectivists will rate the use of an unsubstantiated claim as being more ethical than will Absolutists.

Tansey et al. (1994) and Vitell et al. (1991) have characterized Subjectivists (those measuring high in relativism and low in idealism) as being highly Machiavellian—that "the end justifies the means" (Leslie 2000, p. 51). Forsyth (1980) himself characterized Subjectivists as ethical egoists. Ethical egoists judge the morality of an action by the ensuing net gains rather than by its inherent moral rightness. Researchers have observed that it is possible to measure one's level of Machivellianism. Indeed, Tansey et al. (1994) and Vitell et al. (1991) have noted that the EPQ offers a superior method for measuring Machiavellianism.

Given Leslie's characterization of Machiavellianism and its similarity to ethical egoism, it would follow that Subjectivists would be most likely to rate the use of a fear appeal that is used as a means to an end as being more ethical than the would individuals who espouse any of the other three ideologies. The following hypothesis was proposed:

H_4: Subjectivists will rate sexual appeals used as a means for achieving a greater good as being more ethical than will Situationists, Absolutists or Exceptionists.

None of the research reviewed for this study provided conclusive evidence of a gender effect in ethical evaluations of advertising. Although their study did not involve ethical assessments of advertising, Shavitt et al. (1998, p. 18) found that "On the whole, men's and women's attitudes toward advertising appear largely similar." The authors noted, however, that "Women report being offended by advertising more often than men do." LaTour and Henthorne and Treise et al. also discovered inconclusive correlations between gender and moral appraisals. LaTour and Henthorne (1994, p. 88) vaguely reported that "both men and women expressed serious ethical concerns about the use of [an] overtly sexual ad" and that men felt that "the mild sexual appeal ad was more affable" than did women. Similarly, Treise et al. (1994, p. 66) reported that "It was clear from [their] sample's responses that large numbers of consumers are troubled by the use of sex appeals." Gould (1994, p. 78) has supported the ambiguity of these findings, noting that "Men have generally been found to be more receptive to sexual appeals, though this observation may be attributable to the fact that such appeals have largely been targeted to them." Given this paucity of evidence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H_5: Male and female respondents will rate the use of the sexual appeal, fear appeal and unsubstantiated claim in the same manner.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedure

The measurement instrument was administered to a convenience sample of 372 university students between the ages of 18 and 24 from a large, private Midwestern university. The survey was administered to students enrolled in freshman theology and English courses required for all students at this university. Students were screened so that no respondent could take the survey more than once.

A 10-page, self-administered survey was used to administer the EPQ and to measure ethical evaluations of a sexual appeal, a fear appeal and an unsubstantiated claim (a "puff") used in two four-color stimuli (see Appendix A, pp. 34-42). The product featured in the stimuli was sunscreen—chosen in order to minimize the possibility for respondent moral pre-dispositions toward the product. One stimulus (a "sexual appeal" ad) featured a large color photograph of a woman in a bikini swimming suit reclining on a beach in a sexually suggestive pose under the headline "It feels so good … it's hard to believe it's sunblock" (see Appendix A, p. 38). After timed exposure to the stimulus, respondents were asked to answer two questions designed to measure their ethical evaluations of the stimuli, a method used by LaTour (1994) and Triese et al. Two questions were posed to respondents regarding the sexual appeal ad, using 7-point Likert scales anchored by "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree." They were: (1) It is right to use appeals involving sex when selling sunscreen; and (2) It is right to use pictures of sexy-looking women in advertising, as in the previous ad, to sell sunscreen (see Appendix A, p. 39). The mean of these two items was used as a composite score, creating a "sexual ad scale". The reliability of this two-item scale (using Chronbach's alpha) was .85.

The second stimulus (a "fear appeal" ad) featured a prominent color photograph of basal cell carcinoma (a common type of skin cancer) in conjunction with the headline "Did you know that sunburn is the leading cause of skin cancer?" (See Appendix, p. 40.) After timed exposure to this stimulus, respondents were asked to answer the following two questions using the same 7-point Likert scales: (1) It's wrong to use a photograph of basal cell carcinoma (a form of skin cancer) in the previous ad for sunscreen; and (2) It is wrong for a sunscreen ad to claim that your health may be threatened by skin cancer (see Appendix A, p. 41, items 2 and 3). The mean of these two items was used as a composite score, a "fear ad scale"—the alpha of this scale was found to be .53, adequate reliability for a two-item scale.

One item was used to measure response to the use of an unsubstantiated claim (a puff): "It's right for [the advertiser] to claim that it is 'the ideal protection against over exposure to the sun' even though this claim can't be verified by research" (see Appendix A, p. 41, item 1).

One page of the survey was used to gather respondent demographic information. In order to avoid order effects related to exposure of one ad before the other, half the survey instruments presented the sexual appeal ad stimulus first and half the surveys presented the fear appeal ad first.

RESULTS

Overview

As Forsyth (1980) prescribed, the EPQ was scored by computing the means for the 10 items comprising the idealism and relativism scales. A reliability check (using Cronbach's alpha) of the idealism scale revealed that the reliability of the scale would be improved if Item #7 from the EPQ were omitted, thereby raising the reliability of the scale from an original .71 to .74. Therefore Item #7 was omitted from the computation of the means for idealism. A similar reliability check was performed on the relativism scale—it demonstrated acceptable reliability properties, achieving a score of .82. To create equal subgroups for comparison, the scores on the relativism and idealism scales were split and their medians used to identify high and low groups, creating a 2X2 typology. The sample was primarily comprised of individuals from 18 to 19 years of age (90 percent), the remaining 20- to 24-year-olds making up the remaining 10 percent. Sixty percent were female, 40 percent were male.

Overall, the respondents believed that the use of the sexual appeal was unethical (mean=3.74), that the use of the fear appeal was ethical (mean=5.80), and that the use of the unsubstantiated claim was ethical (mean=4.74).

Hypothesis Tests

To test H_1, respondents who were identified as being Subjectivists and Absolutists were recoded into a single ideology variable to permit analysis. Their responses to the two-item sexual ad scale was tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with level of agreement on the scale serving as the dependent variable, and ideology (Subjectivist vs. Absolutist) serving as the independent variable. As expected, a significant relationship ($F_{1,216}=19.570$, $p<.01$) was observed among Subjectivists and Absolutists concerning their response to the sexual ad (see Table 1). Subjectivists tended to believe, more so than Absolutists, that the sexual appeal ad was ethical. The findings therefore supported H_1.

Table 1
Table of Means Scores For The "Sexy Ad Scale"

Exceptionist (n=76) 4.00^b	Subjectivist (n=107) 4.17^a
Absolutist (n=109) $3.22^{a,b}$	Situationist (n=80) 3.62

Note:
[a] Significant pairwise comparison using Tukey HSD @ p<.01
[b] Significant pairwise comparison using Tukey HSD @ p<.01

The same ideology variable used to test H_1 was used to test H_2. While not significant, (p=.18), Absolutists tended to believe that the use of the fear appeal was more ethical than Subjectivists (see Table 2). H_2 postulated that the converse would hold true. As such, H_2 could not be supported.

Table 2
Table of Means Scores For The "Fear Ad Scale"

Exceptionist (n=76) 5.90	Subjectivist (n=107) 5.64
Absolutist (n=109) 5.84	Situationist (n=80) 5.86

A one-way ANOVA was used to test H_3, with level of agreement on the unsubstantiated claim item serving as the dependent variable and ideology (Subjectivist vs. Absolutist) serving as the independent variable. The test proved insignificant ($F_{1,215}$=.446, p=.51) and H_3 could not be supported (see Table 3).

Table 3
Table of Means Scores for Unsubstantiated Claim

Exceptionist (n=76) 4.47	Subjectivist (n=107) 4.79
Absolutist (n=109) 4.94	Situationist (n=80) 4.68

To test H_4, respondents representing each of the four cells in the 2X2 ethical taxonomy were combined into a new ideological variable. Their response to the sexual ad scale was measured using 4-way ANOVA. The data revealed a significant relationship between ideology and response ($F_{4,372}$=499.08, p<.01). Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test was used to investigate the exact nature of the relationship. The post-hoc test revealed that means scores differed significantly (p<.01) among Subjectivists and Absolutists, and among Exceptionists and

Absolutists only (see Table 1). Given that H_4 predicted a significant difference between Subjectivists and the other three ideologies, H_4 could not be supported.

H_5 was tested by measuring response to the sexual and fear appeal ad scales using 4-way ANOVA with sex of the respondent as a covariate. A significant relationship was observed between response to the sexual ad scale ($F_{4,371}$=250.30, p<.01) and sex of the respondent ($F_{1,371}$=84.73, p<.01). An examination of means scores revealed that female respondents consistently believed—regardless of their ideology—that the use of the sexual appeal was unethical, whereas male respondents believed it was ethical. Although a significant relationship was observed on response to the fear ad scale ($F_{4,371}$=1566.53, p<.01), sex of the respondent was not significant (p=.55). H_5 predicted that male and female respondents would rate the sexual appeal and fear appeal in much the same manner—since response to the sexual appeal netted the only significant sex-related response, H_5 could not be supported.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study lead to three findings: the moral position of Absolutists appears to be quite complex and may vary depending upon the ethical issue at hand; men and women differ in their ethical evaluations of sex appeals in print advertising; measuring and tapping levels of Machiavellianism may prove more difficult than suggested by the literature; and ethical beliefs of Gen Yers may indeed deviate from those of the general population.

Absolutists' Shifting Moral Views

As predicted Subjectivists believed, more so than Absolutists, that the sexual appeal was ethical. While not significant (p=.18), Absolutists tended to believe, more so than Subjectivists, that the use of the fear appeal was ethical—the study predicted that the opposite would hold true. That Absolutists would believe that the use of a sex appeal was unethical and that the use of a fear appeal was ethical is rather perplexing. Given Absolutist's adherence to universal moral laws, one would expect that Absolutists would believe that the use of both appeals would be unethical. Forsyth (1992) sheds some light on the complexity of the Absolutist position. He describes a hypothetical situation involving a business woman who reviews an advertising campaign that describes a product somewhat inaccurately. The Absolutist, Forsyth (1992, p. 464) contends, "will likely object to inaccuracies if she labels them as lies; if, however, they are described as mere puffery and the benefits of a successful campaign are made clear to her, then even an Absolutist may be willing to overlook the inaccuracies." Tansey et al. (1994, p. 61) add to this depiction of Absolutists by noting that they "express a high concern for the welfare of others." Similarly, Vitell et al. (1991, p. 367) note that Absolutists "believe that their actions are moral only if they yield positive consequences." Given these characterizations, it's possible that the execution of the fear appeal ad used in this study (e.g., a photograph of basal cell cancer, a direct reference to the sun causing skin cancer) was such that Absolutists disregarded the use of the fear appeal, placing greater moral importance on skin cancer prevention. While mere speculation, such a thesis may help explain Absolutists' varying ethical evaluations. Clearly, more research is called for in order to determine the exact nature of what appears to be Absolutists' vacillating moral position.

Men, Women and the Use of Sex Appeals in Advertising

The results of this study revealed that men and women differ significantly in their assessments of sexual appeals. Female respondents largely condemned the ad, while male respondents generally endorsed it. Previous studies have not found such a sex-based split in response. LaTour and Henthorne (1994, p. 88) vaguely report that "both men and women expressed serious ethical concerns about the use of [an] overtly sexual ad" and that men felt that "the mild sexual appeal ad was more affable" than did women. Similarly, Treise et al. (1994, p. 66) reported that "It was clear from [their] sample's responses that large numbers of consumers are troubled by the use of sex appeals." Since this study *does* report a difference in response to the ad that featured a sexual appeal, it makes a contribution to the literature by adding gender as a variable in considering the connection between ethical ideology and evaluations of morally-questionable advertising.

It's unclear what may have precipitated the significant difference in response among males and females in this study. The literature offers different views on the results. Reidenbach and Robin (1988) report that student respondents may be "more ethical" than the population as a whole. If so, it would follow that there would likely *not* have been such a distinction in response among males and females—one would expect male and female students to have rated the emotional ad in much the same manner, that it was unethical.

Similarly, the literature suggests that students—as members of Generation Y—might have said that the emotional ad was unethical, regardless of their gender. Given Stapinski's (1999) depiction of Gen Y as idealistic, Kapner's (1997) description of the group as "activists," and Halstead's (1999) suggestion that Gen Y is largely distrustful of society, one might expect male and female students to say that the emotional ad was unethical. On the other hand, the observed differences between men and women concerning the sex appeal wasn't surprising. Women in this study may have been responding to long-standing criticisms that have condemned advertising for its "failure to reflect the changing roles of women, unrealistic and limited portrayals of women interacting only in relation to men and their families … [and portraying] women as sex objects" (Treise et al. 1994, p. 61). Sexually explicit ads may prove particularly problematic for women because they "negatively portray women solely in terms of one narrow and stereotypically presented aspect of their gender roles: as sex objects" (Treise et al. 1994, p. 61). As a result, women tend to respond negatively to ads featuring a sex appeal involving a woman. LaTour and Henthorne report such negative feedback: "a growing segment of the buying public, many of them women, are fed up with the hard sell of sex" (LaTour and Henthorne 1994, p. 89). Indeed, given this evidence, it's no wonder that the women in this study responded negatively to the emotional ad.

Measuring and Tapping Machiavellianism

Despite the assertion of Tansey et al. (1994) that the EPQ accurately measures level of Machiavellianism, the results of this study don't support such a contention. As the test of H_4 demonstrated, not all pairwise comparisons between Subjectivists and the other three ideologies were significant (Subjectivists compared to Absolutists, $p<.01$; Subjectivists compared to Situationists, $p=.1$; Subjectivists compared to Exceptionists, $p=.9$) on the sexy ad scale. These results suggest that the EPQ is not as effective at measuring Machiavellianism as Tansey et al. claim. In hindsight, it would have been preferable that the study be administered using a control group consisting of individuals given the EPQ and an experimental group consisting of individuals given an alternate measure of Machiavellianism, the Mach IV scale (Vitell et al. 1991). Although Tansey et al. (1994) criticize the reliability of the Mach IV scale, calling it "psychometrically problematic," administering the survey to EPQ and Mach IV groups would have provided a more direct test of the suitability of the EPQ as a measure of Machiavellianism.

One other explanation for this study's inability to measure Machiavellianism may be that the two items comprising the sexy ad scale are not efficient at tapping Machiavellianism. The methodology used by Tansey et al. (1994) measured ethical response to two hypothetical business scenarios that described a situation resulting in a moral dilemma; rationale for the deceitful acts was provided as part of the scenarios. Both scenarios were constructed specifically for the study's sample of life insurance agents. Vitell et al. (1991) studied ethical evaluations of 20 consumer situations having potentially ethical implications using a pretested "consumer ethics" scale, consisting of everyday buying situations that may prove morally problematic. Since the life insurance scenarios and the consumer scale were adapted for their respective samples, it's conceivable that the sample used in this study may have responded differently if they were asked to ethically evaluate everyday student situations in which moral dilemmas may arise (e.g., cheating on tests, plagiarism, buying pre-written term papers). On the other hand, given the significant gender split in response to the sexy ad scale, it seemed that the sample had no difficulty in assessing the moral dilemma at hand. Clearly, more research is called for in order to probe the measurement of Machiavellianism and the measures' underlying assumptions.

The Moral Boundaries of Gen Y

As demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2, members of Gen Y included in this study were divided on the use of sex appeals in print advertising, but believed that the use of fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims was ethical. While exact statistical comparisons are not possible due to differences in sampling and methodology, the results of this study differ somewhat from other studies that have examined consumers' ethical evaluations of sex and fear appeals in advertising. The Gen Y sample in this study appeared to be less tolerant of sex appeals in advertising than samples used in previous studies. In the study done by Treise et al. (1994), the authors found that 50 percent of their sample agreed with the statement that "Tastefully done, there is nothing wrong with using sexy ads to sell some kinds of products." By contrast, only 35 percent of Gen Y respondents in this study believed that the use of sex appeals in print advertising was ethical. It therefore appears that the less tolerant views observed in this study coincide with Witt's (1998) claim that members of Gen Y believe that society is suffering from a lack of ethics and Kapner's (1997) characterization of the demographic as an activist group.

Deviations from previous research extended to the use of fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims in print advertising. Based on this sample's assessment of sex appeals in advertising, one might expect them to be less tolerant of fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims than might respondents from previous studies. Rather, it appears as though Gen Y is *more permissive* of fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims than other populations. For example, Treise et al. (1994) found that 22 percent of their sample agreed with the statement "It is wrong for a radon detector ad to claim a family's health may be threatened by radon gas." In this study, only 5 percent of respondents believed that the use of fear appeals in print advertising was unethical. Moreover, only 23 percent of respondents in this study believed that the use of an unsubstantiated claim is unethical.

It's unclear what peculiarities may characterize Gen Y's moral belief systems. There is no support in the literature for the apparent deviations noted in response from this sample compared to others. Clearly, replicating this study with adults outside the Gen Y demographic would be necessary in order to pinpoint specific moral differences. More robust measures of morality, such as Vitell et al.'s (1991) 20-point "consumer ethics" scale, might be profitably used to identify particular instances where the views of Gen Y differ significantly from other adults.

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Implications for Advertisers

One implication that arises from this study is that advertisers might benefit from knowing about their audiences' moral ideologies, particularly among the Gen Y demographic. Since this group is purported to "run away screaming" (Cheng 1999) from brands that lose the demographic's trust, knowing about Gen Y's ethical pre-dispositions may help advertisers insulate themselves from ethical missteps in the marketplace. For example the data suggest that individuals high in relativism appeared to be more tolerant of sexual appeals than individuals high in idealism. Advertisers might therefore benefit from measuring their audience's moral ideologies, particularly in instances where sexual appeals may be considered for use in ads. A preponderance of individuals measuring high in idealism might serve as a signal that the use of a sexual appeal would not be advisable. Doing so, as Treise et al. (1994, p. 68) suggest, may protect advertisers from a variety of "unwanted outcomes … [including] boycotts or demands for government regulation."

One way to consider an audience's moral pre-dispositions is by making moral litmus tests part of the creative planning process. LaTour and Henthorne (1994, p. 89) endorse doing so by suggesting that advertisers "recognize the moral/ethical complexity involved in the use of … sexual appeals and to incorporate that understanding within their strategic thought." That is, advertisers should consider the moral implications of advertising content beforehand—in the planning process—not after and ad has appeared.

While there may be many ways of incorporating a moral barometer into the creative planning process, one possibility may be appointing an ethics committee or "ethics officer." The aim of this committee or individual would be to review agency creative work, searching for potential ethical flash points that may arise from certain types of ad content. Although researchers point out that ethics committees are rather rare (Laczniak and Murphy 1985, p. 102), they suggest that such a group is beneficial in that "it locates the responsibility for ethics with a group having expertise in the very marketing methods that might raise ethical concern," thus focusing authority on those best equipped to deal with ethical issues and centralizing accountability.

Recommendations for Regulators and Policy Makers

As witnessed by the ubiquity of sex appeals in advertising and the media in general, a final implication to this study is that regulators may assist practitioners in keeping moral issues top of mind. To police its own activities, the industry created a formal chain of regulation in the form of the National Advertising Division of the Council of Better Business Bureaus and the National Advertising Review Board. In addition, the American Advertising Federation and the American Association of Advertising Agencies have published comprehensive codes of conduct to, as James et al. (1994, p. 72) assert, distinguish "what precisely is wrong from what is right."

These regulators—in addition to other media policy-makers—can assist practitioners in finding and maintaining their moral bearings by serving as proactive ethics ambassadors and facilitators. One possibility would be to implement ethics subcommittees of these organizations, whose primary responsibilities would be to help agencies establish ethics programs to keep moral issues concerning ad content top of mind. These groups could also help practitioners help themselves by assisting agencies in drafting their own tailored codes of conduct. By taking an active role in addressing moral issues, these organizations could effectively expand their scope and value to the profession by increasing moral sensitivity to advertising content issues among practitioners, providing a strong and clear moral lens for practitioners to identify and confront ethically-questionable advertising.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is using measures to place respondents in experimental conditions versus manipulating ideologies and randomly assigning them to subjects. As such, causal inferences in this study are not possible. Treise et al. note a similar limitation in their study of ethical perceptions and moral ideologies. The authors suggest that experimental manipulation of ideologies among respondents may ultimately strengthen the links between ethical ideology and assessments of advertising. "If subjects can be induced to temporarily adopt one of the ideologies represented in the EPQ, their perceptions of advertising practices can be compared to those of our survey respondents … [and] will allow for more confident assertions of a causal link between ideology and perceptions of specific advertising practices" (Treise et al. 1994, p. 68). Randomly assigning ideological manipulations among respondents would indeed increase the confidence in which causal inferences can be made.

Another limitation is the use of Likert-scale responses for the questions assessing the emotional and rational ads. More insightful information could have been obtained had open-ended items been used to assess the ads. It may have been possible, for example, to pinpoint the exact sources of ethical friction among respondents concerning the emotional ad by incorporating an item such as "If you find the previous Iguana ad morally offensive, why do you feel this way?" By posing such a question, it may have been possible to learn if it was the use of the photo of the woman in the emotional ad, the suggestive headline or the ad in its entirety that respondents found ethically questionable. Moreover, the use of such open-ended questions would have revealed respondents' moral cognitions, netting insight into the make up of their moral sensitivities.

Last, it is possible to criticize the generalizability of the sample. Although Reidenbach and Robin (1988) have claimed that student samples yield results that are generally congruent with other samples in investigations of ethical judgments, the sample used in this study nonetheless reflects limited diversity. As a consequence, it is believed that the results of this study may be confidently generalized across the student population at the university in which the study was administered, but is less generalizable across wider, more diverse adult populations.

Conclusion

This study offers additional empirical support for the usefulness of the EPQ in measuring ethical ideologies, but found that it may have limited value as a measure of Machiavellianism. The study also revealed that one's ethical ideology may be more complex and less clear cut than is suggested in previous research as demonstrated by the apparent moral vacillations among Absolutists. More importantly, however, the results from this study strongly suggest that the moral appraisals of Gen Y may be significantly different than other individuals—while being less tolerant of sexual appeals in advertising, they may be more forgiving of fear appeals and unsubstantiated claims than other demographic groups. And although more research is needed to confirm the evidence of such beliefs uncovered in this study, the size of the demographic and its purported purchasing power suggest that marketers would be wise to investigate the moral bearings of this influential group. If it is indeed true that Gen Yers "run away screaming" from marketers they distrust, it would seem that those who fail to consider the morals of this demographic may indeed suffer the consequences.

REFERENCES

Cheng, Kipp (1999). "Setting Their Sites on Generation 'Y.'" Adweek (August 9), pp. 46–48.

Forsyth, Donelson R. (1980). "A Taxonomy of Ethical Ideologies." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 39 (1), pp. 175–184.

__________________ (1992). "Judging the Morality of Business Practices: The Influence of Personal Moral Philosophies." Journal of Business Ethics (May), pp. 461-472.

Gould, Stephen J. (1994). "Sexuality and Ethics in Advertising: A Research Agenda and Policy Guideline Perspective." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 73-81.

Greyser, Stephen A. (1972). "Advertising: attacks and counters." Harvard Business Review (March-April), 22–24, 26, 28, 140–146.

Henthorne, Tony L.., Michael S. LaTour and Rajan Nataraajan (1993). "Fear Appeals in Print Advertising: An Analysis of Arousal and Ad Response." Journal of Advertising (June), pp. 59-69.

Holbrook, Morris (1987). "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, What's Unfair in the Reflections on Advertising?" Journal of Marketing (July), pp. 95–103.

Hung, Kineta and Marshall Rice (1990), "Ethical Problems of Canadian Advertising Agency Executives," in Proceedings of the 1990 Conference of the American Academy of Advertising, American Academy of Advertising: New York, pp. 214–218.

Hunt, Shelby D. and Lawrence B. Chonko (1987), "Ethical Problems of Advertising Agency Executives," Journal of Advertising (16) 4, pp. 16–24.

Hyman, Michael R. and Richard Tansey (1990). "The Ethics of Psychoactive Ads." Journal of Business Ethics (9), pp. 105-114.

Hyman, Michael R., Richard Tansey and James W. Clark (1994). "Research on Advertising Ethics: Past, Present, and Future." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 5–12.

James, E. Lincoln, Cornelius B. Pratt and Tommy V. Smith (1994), "Advertising Ethics: Practitioner and Student Perspectives," Journal of Mass Media Ethics, pp. 69–83.

Janoff, Barry (1999). "Targeting All Ages." Progressive Grocer (April), pp. 37–46.

Kapner, Suzanne (1997). "Understanding." Restaurant Business (July 15), pp. 48–52.

LaTour, Michael S. and Tony L. Henthorne (1994). "Ethical Judgments of Sexual Appeals in Print Advertising." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 81–90.

LaTour, Michael S., Robert E. Pitts and David C. Snook-Luther (1990). "Female Nudity, Arousal, and Ad Response: An Experimental Investigation." Journal of Advertising, pp. 51-62.

LaTour, Michael S. and Herbert J. Rotfeld (1997). "There are Threats and (Maybe) Fear-Caused Arousal: Theory and Confusions of Appeals to Fear and Fear Arousal Itself." Journal of Advertising (Fall), pp. 45-59.

LaTour, Michael S. and Shaker A. Zahra (1989). "Fear Appeals as Advertising Strategy: Should They Be Used?" The Journal of Consumer Marketing (Spring), pp. 61-70.

Leslie, Larry Z. (2000). Mass Communication Ethics. Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston.

Neubourne, Ellen and Kathleen Kerwin (1999). "Generation Y." Business Week (February 15), pp. 80-88.

Pitts, Robert E., John K. Wong and Joel D. Whalen (1991). "Consumers' Evaluative Structures in Two Ethical Situations: Means-End Approach." Journal of Business Research (March), pp. 119-131.

Pollay, Richard W. (1986). "The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising." Journal of Marketing (April), pp. 18–36.

Preston, Ivan (1994). The tangled web they weave: Truth, falsity and advertisers. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison.

Reidenbach, R. Eric and Donald P. Robin (1988). "Some Initial Steps Toward Improving the Measurement of Ethical Evaluations of Marketing Activities." Journal of Business Ethics (July), pp. 871–879.

________________________________ (1990). "Toward the Development of a Multidimensional Scale for Improving Evaluations of Business Ethics." Journal of Business Ethics (August), pp. 639–653.

Rotzoll, Kim B., James E. Haefner (1990). Advertising in Contemporary Society. 2nd Ed. South-Western Publishing Co.: Cincinatti.

Rushkoff, Douglas (2001). "Merchants of Cool." WGBH: Boston (February 27).

Shavitt, Sharon, Pamela Lowrey and James Haefner (1998). "Public Attitudes Toward Advertising: More Favorable Than You Might Think. Journal of Advertising Research (July/August), pp. 7-22.

Skipper, Robert and Michael R. Hyman (1993). "On Measuring Ethical Judgments." Journal of Business Ethics (July), pp. 535-551.

Stapinski, Helene (1999). "Y Not Love?" American Demographics (February), pp. 63-68.

Tansey, Richard, Gene Brown, Michael R. Hyman, and Lyndon E. Dawson Jr. (1994). "Personal Moral Philosophies and the Moral Judgments of Salespeople." The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management (Winter), pp. 59-68.

Tansey, Richard, Michael R. Hyman, and Gene Brown (1992). "Ethical Judgments About Wartime Ads Depicting Combat." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 57-74.

Thau, Richard (1996). "How do you Target a Market that Wants to be Left Alone?" Vital Speeches of the Day (August 15), pp. 664-667.

Tiezen, Lori (1996). "The X Market." Beverage World (December 15), pp. 98-100.

Tinkham, Spencer F. and Ruth Ann Weaver-Lariscy (1994). "Ethical Judgments of Political Television Commercials as Predictors of Attitude Toward the Ad." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 43-57.

Treise, Debbie, Michael F. Weigold, Jenneane Conna, Heather Garrison. (1994). "Ethics in Advertising: Ideological Correlates of Consumer Perceptions." Journal of Advertising (September), pp. 59–69.

Triff, Michael, Dana Beth Benningfield, John H. Murphy (1987). "Advertising Ethics: A Study of Public Attitudes and Perceptions." Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the American Academy of Advertising, pp. R50–R54.

Tucker, Elizabeth M. and Cornelius B. Pratt (1993). "Advertising and the Consumer Ethics Model: Consumer Ethics and the Decision-Making Process." [Abstract] In Proceedings of the 1993 Conference of the American Academy of Advertising, pp. 103-104.

Turley, L.W. and Scott W. Kelley, (1997), "A Comparison of Advertising Content: Business to Business Versus Consumer Services," Journal of Advertising (Winter), 39–48.

Vitell, Scott J., James R. Lumpkin and Mohammed Y. A. Rawwas (1991). "Consumer Ethics: An Investigation of the Ethical Beliefs of Elderly Consumers." Journal of Business Ethics (May), pp. 365-375.

Vitell, Scott J. and James Muncy (1992). "Consumer Ethics: An Empirical Investigation of Factors Influencing Ethical Judgments of the Final Consumer." Journal of Business Ethics (August), pp. 585-593.

Whalen, Joel, Robert E. Pitts and John K. Wong (1991). "Exploring the Structure of Ethical Attributions as a Component of the Consumer Decision Model: The Vicarious Versus Personal Perspective." Journal of Business Ethics (April), pp. 285-294.

Witt, G. Evans (1999). "Teens Peg Societal Ills." American Demographics (January), p. 21.

Wolburg, Joyce M. and James Pokrywczynski (2001). "The ABCs of XYZ: Self-Identity, Media Depictions, and the Information Value of Advertising Among Generation Y College Students." (In Press). Journal of Advertising Research.

APPENDIX A

THIS SURVEY WILL ASK YOU A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS DEALING WITH ETHICAL ISSUES AND WILL THEN ASK YOU TO REVIEW SOME ADS AND ANSWER SOME ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.

AT NO TIME SHOULD YOU TURN BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGES OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Instructions: You will find a series of general statements listed below. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. You will probably disagree with some items and agree with others.

Please read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by placing an "X" in the box that indicates the level to which you completely disagree or completely agree with each statement.

1. A person should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. The existence of potential harm to others doesn't matter if there are benefits to be gained.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. The dignity and welfare of people should be the most important concern in any society.

   Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. It is often necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. Moral actions are those which closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. There are ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of all codes of ethics.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. Different types of moralities cannot be compared as to "rightness."

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. Moral standards are simply *personal* rules which indicate how a person should behave, and are not to be applied in making judgments of others.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. Trying to force everyone to follow the same moral rules would make it harder for all of us to get along.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not totally depends upon the situation.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.

Completely Disagree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Completely Agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

PLEASE STOP.

AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR.

It feels so good . . .

it's hard to believe it's sunblock.

Unlike other sunblocks that make your skin feel greasy, Iguana® sun care products are non-greasy and go on smooth. What's more, Iguana® products feature aloe vera, so they moisturize your skin while protecting it from the sun's damaging rays. Try Iguana ® sunblock today—it feels so clean and silky you'll find it hard to believe it's sunblock!

IGUANA

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Instructions: You will find a series of general statements listed below regarding the ad you just saw. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. You will probably disagree with some items and agree with others.

Please read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by placing an "X" in the box that indicates the level to which you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each statement.

1. It is right to use appeals involving sex when selling sunscreen.

Strongly Agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Strongly Disagree
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

2. It is right to use pictures of sexy-looking women in advertising, as in the previous Iguana ad, to sell sunscreen.

Strongly Agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Strongly Disagree
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PLEASE STOP.

AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR.

40

Did you know that sunburn is the leading cause of skin cancer?

It is — that's why leading dermatologists recommend Iguana®sunscreens for protection from the sun's harmful rays.

Your skin is perhaps your body's most sensitive organ.

You see, every time you venture outside with your skin unprotected — even on cloudy days — you run the risk of over-exposing your skin to the sun.

Basal Cell Carcinoma is a common form of skin cancer often caused by over-exposure to the sun.

And skin that's over-exposed to the sun can, over time, be predisposed to many forms of skin cancer.

Iguana®sunscreens feature zinc oxide, an ideal sunscreen that transparently blocks both UVA and UVB rays. It even has skin-soothing properties making it perfect for daily use. What's more, Iguana®sunscreens can even be applied to wet skin!

Look for zinc oxide in Iguana® Sunblock SPF 30.

Iguana® — the ideal protection against over exposure to the sun.

IGUANA

Instructions: You will find a series of general statements listed below regarding the ad you just saw. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. You will probably disagree with some items and agree with others.

Please read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by placing an "X" in the box that indicates the level to which you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each statement.

1. It's right for Iguana to claim that it is "the ideal protection against over exposure to the sun" even though this claim can't be verified by research.

   Strongly Agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Strongly Disagree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. It's wrong to use a photograph of basal cell carcinoma (a form of skin cancer) in the previous ad for Iguana's sunscreen.

   Strongly Agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Strongly Disagree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. It is wrong for a sunscreen ad to claim that your health may be threatened by skin cancer.

   Strongly Agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ Strongly Disagree
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

PLEASE STOP.

AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE
SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR.

PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Sex:**

   Male ☐
   Female ☐

2. **What city and state did you come to Creighton from?**

   City ____________________

   State _______

3. **Age:**

   ______

4. **Grade in School:**

   Freshman ☐
   Sophomore ☐
   Junior ☐
   Senior ☐
   Graduate Student ☐

5. **When was the last time you purchased sunblock or sunscreen? (check the box that best applies to you)**

   ☐ 0–3 months ago
   ☐ 4–6 months ago
   ☐ 7–9 months ago
   ☐ 10–11 months ago
   ☐ 1–2 years ago
   ☐ More than 2 years ago

   ☐ Never purchased

PLEASE STOP.

RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE
TO THE SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR.
THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

The Effects of Visuals on Ethical Reasoning: What's a Photograph Worth to Journalists Making Moral Decisions?

By Renita Coleman, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Manship School of Mass Communication
221 Journalism Building
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
(225) 578-2045
rcoleman@lsu.edu

Paper submitted for consideration by the Media Ethics Division of AEJMC for the 2002 annual conference.

The Effects of Visuals on Ethical Reasoning: What's a Photograph Worth to Journalists Making Moral Decisions?

ABSTRACT

Two experiments are used to explore the effects of photographs on ethical decision-making in the journalism domain. Both studies found that photographs did have the ability to change participants' ethical reasoning for the better. Also, both identified mental elaboration as significant in that process; thinking about the people affected by an ethical situation helped improve ethical reasoning. Involvement was also important; when participants were not very involved with the dilemmas, having photographs significantly improved their ethical reasoning.

THE EFFECTS OF VISUALS ON ETHICAL REASONING:
What's a Photograph Worth to Journalists Making Moral Decisions?

INTRODUCTION

The idea that photographs hold special powers has become ubiquitous (Sontag, 1977; Freedberg, 1989; Garcia & Stark, 1991). Photographs have been charged with "altering people's minds and rearranging their lives" (Goldberg, 1991, p. 7), and bringing both "help and harm to others" (Lester, 2000, p. 57). Almost no treatment of the photographic medium goes without mentioning its power. And in the next breath, there is frequently talk of ethics (Lester, 2000; Berger, 1998). Some authors even equate visual images with morality. Sontag writes of the "possibility of being affected morally by photographs" and the "moral outrage" that photographs can induce (Sontag, 1977, p. 19), while Goldberg talks of how images "could rouse consciences" (Goldberg, 1991, p. 199) and help lead to social reform and cultural change. Barry (1997) says images can affect moral judgment. Even some newsroom professionals ascribe special powers to photographs for elevating the level of ethical discussion. "Whenever a photograph is involved, it does raise the level of discussion about ethics. Journalists make better arguments when there's a picture," said a former managing editor of a major daily newspaper (Bolch, 2001).

Is this recurring connection of visual images to moral reasoning and behavior mere speculation? Or is there something to the link that scholars of the photograph have perceived again and again -- that certain photographs indeed have the power to affect us morally? The purpose of the two studies reported here is to explore the role of photographs in the context of ethical decision-making in the journalism domain. Much research has been conducted on the effects of photographs on audiences. Photographs have been shown to have effects on their viewers, and that includes journalists. These effects, in turn, may have some impact on the decisions the journalists make. This study examines the effects that photographs have on journalists' ethical reasoning.

This research grew out of findings from another study that found when journalists were presented with a photograph and asked to make an ethical decision, their ethical reasoning scores were significantly higher than when they were not shown a photograph (Coleman & Wilkins, 2002). This study attempts to see if this finding holds up under more rigorous experiments and explores the relationship between visual information, cognitive processing, and ethical decision-making.

This study will make a significant contribution to the understanding of how images influence cognitive processing of ethical issues and will add to our understanding of journalists' ethical reasoning processes in an area that has not been studied previously – the area of visual communication. If visual information does lead to a different quality of ethical reasoning, then by understanding how visual processing interacts with rational, cognitive processing, journalists can improve their ethical reasoning and decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effects of Photos

Photographers and designers have long been aware of the power of visual storytelling, and research has backed that up. For instance, photographs positively predict readership (McCombs, Mauro & Son, 1988), and large ones attract readers better than small ones (Huh, 1994). Readers typically look at the dominant photograph first (Bohle & Garcia, 1987), and process 75% of the photographs in contrast with only 25% of the text (Garcia

& Stark, 1991). Readers are better able to remember information from a story with a large picture than with a small picture or no picture (Huh, 1994).

It is well documented that the addition of pictures to text leads to superior information acquisition (Graber, 1990; Katz, Adoni & Parness, 1977; Madigan, 1983). This is especially true when stories are accompanied by photographs that are vivid or arouse curiosity (Gibson & Zillman, 2000). Photographs can have an agenda-setting effect with dominant photographs increasing perception of importance (Wanta, 1988).

Besides the informative qualities of photographs, pictures have an affective component. Pictures make information more touching than purely verbal messages (Burgoon, 1980; Meyrowitz, 1985; Lewis, 1984) and have the potential to generate powerful emotional responses (Biocca, 1991; Graber, 1990). Culbertson (1974) found that highly emotional photographs can affect people's judgment. Some research has shown that photographs that accompany text can alter perceptions (Grimes & Drechsel, 1996; Gibson, Zillmann & Sargent, 1999) even when the information provided in photographs is incidental and not mentioned in the text (Gibson & Zillmann, 2000). If it is indeed the case that these types of judgments can be influenced by images, then it is not far off to suggest that photographs may influence ethical judgments as well.

Cognitive Processing of Visuals

Many theories address the cognitive and neurobiological processes responsible for these different effects of images. Research into the biological function of the brain has concluded that there are separate systems for visual, verbal, and auditory information (Levin & Devine-Hawkins, 1974). The brain's left hemisphere is thought to be responsible for speech and writing, while the right hemisphere is devoted to imagery and emotion. The route through the right side of the brain is immediate and unthinking; the left-brain pathway analyzes signals and adds emotional response after cognition. Basically, visuals trigger automatic processing by appealing directly to perceptual channels (i.e.: mindless activity) while words demand controlled processing and are analytically considered in the left side of the brain (Kosslyn, 1983; Paivio, 1983). Brain imaging data show that thinking in images is different from thinking in language, and that it results in different behavioral consequences (Barry, 1997).

In line with the biological theory that visual and verbal information are processed in different hemispheres of the brain, there are several theories that address the idea that visual and verbal data are cognitively different. Paivio's dual-coding theory (1986), for example, says that visual and verbal information are represented in two independent subsystems but are interconnected, so information can be transferred between the two and also pooled together. This theory predicts that presenting information in more than one modality enhances memory. Similarly, redundancy theory says information presented in multiple modes has a better chance of "getting through" (Hsia, 1971; Reese, 1984).

If dual coding leads to better recall, the use of two systems in the brain also may be expected to lead to greater elaboration -- or thinking about a problem -- which results in higher quality ethical reasoning. The primary theory in use today regarding mental elaboration is Petty and Cacioppo's (1986a, 1986b) Elaboration Likelihood Model. The ELM posits that people process messages in one of two ways: The "central route" requires cognitive effort, that is, actually thinking before forming an attitude. Processing via this route requires people to possess both the ability and motivation to make this effort. Processing via the peripheral route is less likely to result in durable attitude change or influence behavior. Visual images can be processed by either route, with the key being whether the person has the ability or the motivation to make the cognitive effort required for central processing. Most photographs are used as peripheral cues, but those that attract the viewer's attention and hold it, encouraging the viewer to think about what they contain, will be processed centrally. Images that radically depart from what one expects compel further processing via the central route. It is this type of central processing, involving much mental elaboration, that is investigated in this study. The stimulus photographs have been chosen to increase the likelihood of being centrally processed.

Attention and Involvement

One of the hypotheses of this research is that images induce people to think about or elaborate on others whom their ethical decisions would affect and that elaboration results in better ethical reasoning. This type of elaboration often manifests as involvement or attention -- a focused sensory and cognitive effort with limited effort given to other things, or thinking about the content and relating it to prior knowledge (Perse, 1990). Visuals with emotional qualities have been linked to increased attention (Brosius, 1993) and involvement (Garcia & Stark, 1991; Husselbee & Adams, 1996; Berlyne, 1963), which is of interest to this study; one premise is that photographs that illustrate the dilemmas will increase people's attention or involvement with the dilemmas, resulting in greater elaboration and higher ethical reasoning.

Much recent research has concentrated on the role of involvement in mediating information encoding, processing, and retention (Batra & Ray, 1983). The consensus seems to be that under high involvement conditions, an individual becomes aroused, processes incoming stimuli more attentively and systematically, and generates more thoughts in general (Salmon, 1986). The Elaboration Likelihood Model is based upon this principle (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a) and says that under high involvement conditions, greater attention and elaboration should be allocated to the substance of a message; in contrast, under low involvement conditions, less attention is paid to the substantive arguments but the peripheral cues have greater influence. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b).

Finally, studies of picture memory conclude that unexpected or novel pictures are remembered better than are typical ones (Friedman, 1979; Bower, Black & Turner, 1979) and they receive higher levels of attention (Loftus & Mackworth, 1978).

Summary

This study is designed to explore the influence on ethical judgment of visual information that comes from photographs. Because the pictures used in this study are novel or unexpected they should increase the attention and involvement that results in more cognitive elaboration, and because of the superior processing that occurs when visual and verbal information is paired, the information from these photographs should be processed more deeply and via the central route by participants in these studies. It is hypothesized that the photographs will convey information about the social problems and the people involved in them that is qualitatively different from the kind of information conveyed through text, and that this should result in higher levels of ethical reasoning.

If the information in photographs does improve ethical reasoning, then the addition of this kind of information to journalists' ethical decision-making may improve the outcomes. Many journalists involved in making ethical decisions never see or interacted with the people affected by those decisions. For example, managing editors and others in the upper levels of the news organization do not routinely see or talk to the people in stories, yet they may have the final say. Distance may be equated with objectivity and fairness, but it also may prevent these gatekeepers from considering all the information pertinent to a decision -- that is, the information that visuals supply beyond anything that words could explain.

Ethical Theory

Piaget (1965) is credited with originating the field of moral development research. He defined moral reasoning as cognitive operations, with higher quality reasoning being the ability to consider more things at once and in more complex ways. Expanding upon Piaget's work, Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) developed his stage theory of moral development that is the most widely used today. Kohlberg's theory categorizes people into three kinds of reasoners -- Preconventional, Conventional, and Postconventional. The Preconventional reasoner is concerned with his or her own welfare. Acts that provide satisfaction to the self and others are "right," but others are considered only when their needs are in line with one's own. Conventional reasoners are defined by conformity to the expectations of society. Helping others and gaining their approval drives an individual's actions. At this level, one's moral reasoning is dominated by "doing one's duty" and maintaining social order for its own sake. In the highest stage, Postconventional reasoners respect laws and rules only so far as they appeal to universal ethical principles. Right and wrong is determined by mutuality. Principles of conscience define morality at this level.

Carol Gilligan (1982) challenged Kohlberg's theory on the basis that it was biased against women. She argued that women develop differently than men, placing more emphasis on caring for others. Kohlberg acknowledged his former student's criticisms and later revised his rights-based theory of justice to include an ethic of care in the highest stages of moral development.

Another student of Kohlberg's (Rest, 1979, 1983, 1986) extended his theory by applying it to the professions. Nurses, doctors, veterinarians, accountants, and social workers, among others, have all been examined for their level of moral development.

A primary focus of media ethics research has been on what influences journalists' ethical decisions. Among the many and myriad variables studied are family, teachers, (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996), age and education (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Voakes, 1997), news organization ownership (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996), newsroom influences (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996), competition, professional values and norms, the law, news subjects and sources, advertisers, and the audience (Breed, 1955; Voakes, 1997; Singletary et al., 1990; White & Singletary, 1993; White & Pearce, 1991), intrinsic motivations (White, 1996), work experience (Maier, 2000), and size of news organization (Beam, 1990, 1993; Maier, 2000; Singletary, Caudill, Caudill & White, 1990; White & Pearce, 1991; White & Singletary, 1993). No research has used visuals as a variable. Exploring the value that visuals add to the mix that results in better moral thinking should be included in a multi-faceted approach to the goal of elevating journalistic ethical standards.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Based on the cognitive theories and related dynamics such as involvement outlined above, the following research questions and hypotheses are offered:

> **H1: Ethical reasoning scores will be significantly higher for participants who see photographs than for participants who do not.**

This prediction is based on studies that show information presented in more than one mode (visual and verbal) enhances memory and encourages the use of two systems in the brain, which leads to better recall and greater mental elaboration (Barry, 1997; Paivio, 1983, 1986; Hsia, 1971; Severin, 1976). This greater recall and elaboration should then result in higher quality ethical reasoning. This will be enhanced by the use of novel images, which have been show to compel greater processing via the central route (Friedman, 1979; Bower, Black & Turner, 1979; Loftus & Mackworth, 1978; Nunnally & Lemond, 1973) that should result in higher quality ethical reasoning. Additionally, this hypothesis is based on research showing that photographs accompanying text can alter perceptions and have a dominant influence on judgment (Higgins, 1996; Culbertson, 1974; Graber, 1990; Grimes & Drechsel, 1996; Gibson, Zillmann & Sargent, 1999; Gibson & Zillmann, 2000).

> **H2: Participants who see photographs will have significantly higher levels of mental elaboration about stakeholders than participants who do not.**

Emotionally laden images have been shown to induce people to think about or elaborate on others to a greater degree than when they cannot see the people whom their decisions would affect (Graber, 1990; Loftus & Mackworth, 1978; Friedman, 1979).

H3: More mental elaboration about stakeholders is significantly associated with higher ethical reasoning scores.

This hypothesis is the result of combining results from studies that show greater mental elaboration produces higher quality decisions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b) with findings that pictures of people focus viewers' attention on others (Graber, 1990), and moral development theory that says good ethical decisions are the result of intellectual reasoning that appeals to mutuality and universality (Piaget, 1965; Kohlberg, 1969). Greater focus on and mental elaboration about other individuals in ethical situations should help encourage reasoning that involves universal ethical principles Đ the hallmark of higher order ethical reasoning.

H4: Participants who see photographs will show significantly higher involvement levels than participants who do not.

Studies have shown that unusual or novel visuals have been linked to initiating and maintaining higher levels of attention, interest, and involvement (Brosius, 1993; Garcia & Stark, 1991; Berlyne, 1963, 1974;).

H5: Participants who see photographs will spead significantly more time processing the dilemmas than participants who do not.

Studies have shown that novel things, such as the photographs in this study, take more time to process. Numerous experiments have found that novel stimuli dominated visual investigation (see Nunnally & Lemond, 1973, for a review). Latency measures are frequently used to operationalize cognitive processing.

> **RQ1: Are there any significant interactions between seeing photographs and psychological variables that affect ethical reasoning?**

Much research on cognition is interested in interactions rather than simply main effects. Complicated cognitive processes such as those involved in ethical reasoning are unlikely to be affected by single variables; rather, it is the combination of variables that better explains decision-making processes such as ethical reasoning.

METHODOLOGY

An experimental design was used to explore whether visuals have a cause and effect relationship on ethical reasoning. The two experimental studies use the same dependent measure of ethical reasoning -- an adaptation of James Rest's Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1979). The DIT has been shown to reliably measure a person's level of ethical development using Kohlberg's six stages. The stimuli were four ethical dilemmas that might be encountered by working journalists. In each, participants decided whether to run a photograph after someone associated with the subject of the photograph requested it not run, and whether a journalist should run a story when none of the sources will go "on the record." The second experiment was streamlined by including only the run-the-photograph decision. Participants in the treatment group saw photographs along with the text of the dilemmas; control group participants received only the text.

All dilemmas were set in a newspaper of unspecified size to control for possible perceived ethical differences between print and broadcast, and between local and national media outlets (Husselbee & Adams, 1996).

In the first study, a 2x2x4 mixed factorial design, one within-subjects factor was dilemma type (run photograph/use anonymous sources), and the other was story issue (prostitution, drugs, elder abuse, domestic violence). All participants received all four stories and both dilemma questions. The between-subjects factor was photograph condition (with photograph/without photograph). Participants either saw photographs or did not.

The second study was also a 2x2x4 mixed factorial design where the between-subjects factor was again photograph condition (with photograph/without photographs), and one within-subjects factor was story issue (drugs, prostitution, elder abuse, homelessness), but the other within-subjects factor was race (white/non-white). This was done to eliminate possible confounds between race and age. In the first study, the two photographs of whites were both adults; the two photographs of non-whites were both children. This was better controlled in the second study by substituting one photograph and story so that there were photographs of adults and children for both races. Dilemma type was changed so that all four asked whether to run the photograph.

Stimuli

In one dilemma, a journalist is working on a story about children who imitate their parents' drug use. In the run-photograph dilemma, the journalist is a photographer who has a compelling photograph of a 5-year-old girl with rubber tubing wrapped around her arm and a syringe pointed at her forearm pretending to inject IV drugs. The photograph was taken in a public place and the children's parents have given the photographer permission to take pictures. Afterward, the children's grandmother calls the photographer and asks that the paper not run the photograph. The run-photograph dilemma is patterned after an actual case (Borden 1996). In that case, as in the no-photograph condition, journalists must make the decision without ever seeing the picture in question.

In the anonymous sources dilemma, the journalist is a reporter who is faced with the same situation but instead of a request not to run a photograph, there are a multitude of sources, none of who will go on the record or allow their names to be used. In the with-photograph condition, the picture is shown to participants but there is no mention of a problem with use of the photograph; it is merely presented as additional information.

The other three stories mirror the first with the exception of topic. The other story topics are abuse and neglect of elderly patients by home health care providers; battered women married to middle- and upper-class businessmen; and a teenage prostitute with a young child. In the second study, the domestic abuse story was substituted for a story about homeless families in order to include a photograph of a white child (See Appendix for the stories).

To control for order effects, a Latin Square design was used in both studies (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). One-hundred-and-ninety-four journalism students in the first study and 103 in the second were randomly assigned to the treatment or control group. A student population is appropriate because this is an exploratory study designed to see if effects are present at all; it is not concerned with generalizability (Lang, 1996; Basil, 1996; Courtright, 1996).

Instruments

The dependent variable in this study, level of ethical reasoning, is operationalized by a paper-and-pencil instrument designed to work like the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1979). The DIT has been given to thousands of subjects in its more than 30-year history and has been shown to be highly reliable and valid (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999). It is the premiere instrument of its kind in use today.

Immediately after reading the ethical problem, participants indicated whether they would run the photograph/use unnamed sources or not or couldn't decide. Next, participants rated on a 5-point scale how important each of 12 issue statements was in making their decision. The statements were adapted from the DIT in order to assure validity. All issue statements were significantly correlated with at least two other DIT statements at the same ethical stage and had no other significant correlations with other stages. Finally, participants ranked the statements that were most important, second most important, third most important and fourth most important in their decisions.

In the first study, participants were also asked to complete a thought-listing protocol, a projective test of cognitive processing that is the principle means for gathering observations of the knowledge activated by people during message processing (Shapiro 1994; Cacioppo & Petty 1981). Number of thoughts recorded was used as a measure of mental elaboration. The thought-listing was eliminated in the second study to guard against test fatigue.

In both studies, a questionnaire measured demographics and participants' involvement and mental elaboration about various people (Lodge, McGraw & Stroh, 1989; Wicks, 1992, 1995) on Likert scales.

RESULTS

For both studies, normal probability test showed linearity, no skewness or kurtosis for all variables. No cases were identified as influential outliers using Mahalanobis distance scores so all data were retained for analysis.

Of the 196 participants who completed the first study, 92 saw photographs and 102 did not. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 45 with a mean of 23 years. Women made up 69% of the sample.[1] The mean ethical reasoning score for all four dilemmas was 18.2 (s.d. = 5.63) with the lowest score a 6 and the highest a 35 out of a possible 40.

Of the 103 respondents in the second study, 51 saw photographs and 52 did not. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 with a mean age of 20 years. Women made up 73% of the sample. The mean ethical reasoning score for all four dilemmas was 19.04 (s.d. = 5.95) with the lowest score a 5 and the highest a 35 out of a possible 40. This was not significantly different (F = 1.45, d.f. = 1, 295, p = .229) from the mean ethical reasoning score of the participants in the first study.

The four involvement measures were indexed (Cronbach's alpha = .87) as were the number of total thoughts per story (Cronbach's alpha = .91), total number of positive thoughts (Cronbach's alpha = .80), and total number of negative thoughts (Cronbach's alpha = .82). Approximately half the participants reported high levels of involvement in both studies (Study 1: M = 8.01; s.d. = 1.72; Study 2: M = 8.23; s.d. = 1.5).

Principal components analysis factoring with orthogonal rotation was used to factor analyze responses to the mental elaboration questions that asked how much participants thought about the people involved in the dilemmas (primary and secondary stakeholders, the journalists, readers or viewers, those who would be unnamed sources or who asked the photograph not run). Three factors resulted, accounting for 58% of the total variance in the first study and 60% in the second. They were labeled "Think About Journalists," "Think About Audiences," and "Think About Stakeholders." The ratings of the variables were averaged to obtain a composite measure. Interitem consistency ranged from Cronbach's alpha of .89 to .75.

Findings

Hypothesis 1, that ethical reasoning scores will be significantly higher for participants who see photographs, was supported in one study, and partially supported in the other. In the first study, the hypothesis was not supported with a main effect (F = .625, d.f. = 1, 192, p > .05) (See Table 1). However, there was a significant interaction between photographs and involvement, with involvement moderating the effect of photographs. In this study, under conditions of low involvement, photographs did raise ethical reasoning levels significantly (See Table 4 and Figure 1).

In the second study, when the dilemmas were simplified and the questionnaire shortened, this hypothesis was supported. Participants who saw photographs had significantly higher ethical reasoning scores than participants who did not (F = 13.61, d.f. = 1, 101, p < .001). The mean ethical reasoning score for those who saw photographs was 5.27 (s.d. = 1.18) and for those who did not was 4.25 (s.d. = 1.59) (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
ANOVA Results of Effect of Photograph Condition on Ethical Reasoning

Ethical Reasoning	Mean-Photos (s.d.)	Mean-No Photos (s.d.)	d.f.	F value
Study 1	4.63 (1.42)	4.47 (1.39)	1, 192	.625
Study 2	5.27 (1.18)	4.25 (1.50)	1, 101	13.61***

* p < .05   ** p < .01   *** p < .001

Hypothesis 2, participants who see photographs will have significantly higher levels of mental elaboration about stakeholders, was supported in both studies (See Table 2). In the first study, (F = 4.3, d.f. = 1, 191, p = .019), the mean score on the Stakeholders index for people who saw photographs was 7.7 (s.d. = 1.55); the mean for people who did not see photographs was 7.4 (s.d. = 1.6). In the second study, (F = 4.82, d.f. = 1, 101, p = .016), those who saw photographs also thought about stakeholders significantly more (Photographs M = 14, s.d. = 3.15; No photographs M = 12.69, s.d. = 3).

TABLE 2
ANOVA Results of Effect of Photograph Condition on Mental Elaboration About Stakeholders

Stakeholders	Mean-Photos (s.d.)	Mean-No Photos (s.d.)	d.f.	F value
Study 1	7.7 (1.55)	7.4 (1.6)	1, 191	4.3**
Study 2	14 (3.15)	12.69 (3)	1, 101	4.8*

* p < .05   ** p < .01   *** p < .001

Hypothesis 3, that more mental elaboration about stakeholders will be significantly associated with higher ethical reasoning scores, was supported in both studies (See Table 3). In the first study, the correlation between ethical reasoning and Stakeholders was highly significant (r = .246, p = .006), as it was in the second experiment (r = .335, p = .001).

TABLE 3
Pearson Product Moment Correlations between Ethical Reasoning, Involvement and Mental Elaboration

	Ethical Reasoning	Involvement	Total Thoughts
Ethical Reasoning			
Involvement			
Study 1	.043		
Study 2	.017		
Total Thoughts			
Study 1	-.092	.187****	
Stakeholders			
Study 1	.246***	.643****	.214***
Study 2	.335****	.453****	N/A
Audiences			
Study 1	.010	.469****	.070
Study 2	.226**	.456****	N/A

* p < .10   ** p < .05   *** p < .01   **** p < .001

Hypothesis 4, participants who see photographs will show significantly higher involvement levels than participants who do not, was not supported in the first study (F = .164, d.f. = 1, 191, p = .343), or in the second (F = 1.74, d.f. = 1,101, p = .095). This was not tested in the second study.

Hypothesis 5, that participants who see photographs will spend significantly more time processing the dilemmas, was supported (F = 6.66, d.f. = 1, 155, p = .006). People who saw photographs spent an average of 32-and-a-half minutes on the study; people without photographs spent 30 minutes on average. This was not tested in the second study.

Research Question 1, Are there any significant interactions between seeing photographs and psychological variables that affect ethical reasoning, produced two significant interactions (See Table 4 & Figure 1 and Table 5 & Figure 2). For the first analysis, the interval level involvement index was divided into three approximately equal groups -- high, medium, and low involved -- and used as an independent variable along with the photograph condition in a two-way ANOVA with the ethical reasoning score as the dependent variable. There was a highly significant interaction between photographs and involvement on ethical reasoning (F = 5.57, d.f. = 2, 186, p = .004). Participants who were not very involved (low group) used significantly higher levels of ethical reasoning when photographs were present than when they were not (F = 10.65, d.f. = 1, 65, p = .002; Low involvement/with photographs M = 20.42, Low involvement/no photographs M = 16.41). The means between participants who saw photographs and participants who did not were not significantly different in either the medium-involvement or high-involvement groups. In addition, there was a main effect of involvement (F = 3.41, d.f. = 2, 186, p = .035), with highly involved participants showing significantly higher levels of ethical reasoning than moderately involved participants (Tukey's post hoc analysis, p = .041; High M = 4.83, Medium M = 4.24).

This analysis points to the relationship between ethical reasoning and photographs as being moderated by low involvement. This was confirmed using tests of moderators described by Baron and Kenney (1986).

TABLE 4
Interaction of Involvement and Photographs on Ethical Reasoning

	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F (Sig.)
With Photos/No Photos	.584	1	.584	.314
Involvement	12.68	2	6.34	3.41*
Photos X Involvement	20.72	3	10.36	5.57**
Error	349.56	186	1.86	
Total	4396.63	192		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The second significant interaction involved thinking about audiences. For this analysis, the Audiences index was divided into three equal groups. The presence of photographs significantly interacted with how much people thought about audiences (F = 7.42, d.f. = 2, 187, p = .001). When participants were not thinking about audiences much (low group), the presence of photographs led to significantly higher levels of ethical reasoning (F = 15.66, d.f. = 1, 53, p = .0005. Low think group/no photographs M = 3.83, Low think group/with photographs M = 5.18). The second study did not produce any significant interactions.

TABLE 5
Interaction of Thinking About Readers and Photos on Ethical Reasoning

	Sum of Squares	d.f.	Mean Square	F (Sig.)
With Photos/No Photos	49.18	1	49.18	1.64
Think About Readers	6.97	2	3.49	.116
Photos X Readers	444.44	2	222.11	7.42***
Error	5630.23	187	29.95	
Total	70346	193		

* p < .05   ** p < .01   *** p < .001

DISCUSSION

Overall, 4 of the 5 hypotheses tested in these studies were confirmed in full or in part. After the first study provided more information about the hypothesized relationships, the second study provided more confidence in the results. These studies have identified several effects on ethical reasoning, including the effect of photographs. Both studies agreed that photographs did have the ability to change participants' ethical reasoning for the better. Also, both were consistent in identifying one variable as significant in that process: Thinking about the people affected by an ethical situation. How involved the decision-maker was with the ethical problem was also important.

In one study, photographs alone were enough to elevate all participants' ethical reasoning. In the other, photographs only made a difference when participants weren't very involved with the ethical dilemma. Showing photographs to participants who didn't care much about the dilemma or thought it wasn't very important somehow helped their ethical reasoning climb to new heights in one study. In the other study, mean ethical reasoning scores were higher for all participants who saw photographs, regardless of how involved they were, than for participants who didn't see photographs. In the first study, the effect of photographs was most likely masked by the complexity of the dilemmas, possible confounds between race and age, and different types of decisions -- whether to run photographs or use anonymous sources. Also, it is likely that fatigue was a factor in the first study, which took more time to complete than the second. When the study was shortened, simplified, and the confounds eliminated, the effect of photographs only previously hinted at emerged clearly -- photographs by themselves did indeed improve ethical reasoning in this sample.

It is well documented that the addition of pictures to text leads to superior information acquisition (Graber, 1990; Madigan, 1983), especially when the pictures are vivid or arouse curiosity (Gibson & Zillman, 2000). In light of these findings, it should not be so surprising that the addition of pictures to text also leads to superior reasoning about ethical information. Compelling images have been shown to change the way people process information (Newhagen & Reeves,1992), and that also may include the processing of ethical information.

What is less clear from this research are the mechanisms that photographs use to produce these higher levels of ethical reasoning, although one thing did emerge as important in both studies. Thinking about the people who would be affected by an ethical decision was important. Seeing photographs made people think about stakeholders more, and more thoughts about stakeholders were positively related to better ethical reasoning.

Dual processing, or the use of both visual and verbal systems in the brain, may be partly responsible. The use of two systems in the brain may be expected to lead to greater elaboration, which then results in higher quality ethical reasoning. In the study with a latency measure, people who saw photographs spent significantly more time processing the dilemmas. The effect of mental elaboration was not consistent across all types of elaboration. It is not simply greater mental elaboration of any sort that makes a difference. For example, thinking about journalists, thinking about audiences, and just having more thoughts in general or thoughts of a certain valence did not produce the same effects on ethical reasoning as thinking about stakeholders. The addition of visual images did encourage greater elaboration of all sorts, but that was not always associated with better ethical reasoning. That thinking about stakeholders was especially influential in ethical reasoning is intuitive; the consequences of an ethical decision are felt most by the people who have the greatest to lose or gain.

Another important variable was involvement. When participants in the first study were not very involved with the dilemmas, having photographs significantly improved their ethical reasoning. Those low-involved people were significantly more likely to make better ethical decisions when they saw photographs than when they did not. The findings regarding low involvement and photographs interacting to produce higher levels of ethical reasoning mirror the results of Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman's (1981) study on adoption of comprehensive exams for seniors where source expertise served as a powerful peripheral cue to low-involved students. Similarly in this work, under low involvement, photographs served as powerful peripheral cues. Just as Petty et al. found that credibility effects are strongest for participants not involved in the outcomes and that the uninvolved are most likely to respond to superficial cues as a convenient shortcut, in this study participants who were uninvolved responded similarly to the cues provided by photographs. From the viewpoint of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, it is not surprising that photographs had the ability to induce significant changes in ethical reasoning. Whether these changes are predictive of behavior depends on whether the photograph was acting as central or peripheral cues and is a question for future study.

In real life, people are often confronted with topics that are not personally relevant, useful, or interesting. Rather than exerting a great deal of cognitive effort to evaluate the situation, people use less effort and concentrate on peripheral cues such as photographs. This would seem to be a plausible explanation for what is happening to the participants in this study; those who are not personally interested in the ethical dilemmas did not expend a great deal of cognitive effort on the problems and that resulted in lower levels of ethical reasoning.

In a laboratory study, the artificiality of the conditions may reasonably be expected to lead to low involvement in participants. But it is not hard to imagine when working journalists might operate under conditions of low involvement -- those facing deadlines that limit the time they have to process the arguments thoroughly, for example. Television journalists especially may experience this. Instead of processing information thoroughly, journalists under pressure may rely on visuals as a convenient shortcut. Under these conditions, this study shows that visuals can be a valuable addition to ethical decision-making in that they boost the quality of ethical reasoning when conditions are not conducive to high involvement.

There is even the possibility that low involvement can result because journalists simply fail to recognize that there is an ethical issue to be dealt with. The first step in Rest's Four-Component Model of ethical reasoning (Rest, 1983) is what he calls "Moral Sensitivity." This basically involves interpreting the situation as involving an ethical issue. "Imagine a person who fails to act morally because it just didn't occur to him or her that something he or she might be doing (or could do) would affect other people" (Rest & Narvaez, 1984, p. 23). This has been the case in numerous real-life dilemmas, for example, when Time editors darkened O.J. Simpson's photograph. Voakes found that many journalists who were sued for invasion of privacy "did not seem particularly adept at recognizing" a potential legal problem (Voakes, 1998, p. 388).

CONCLUSION

The main premise of this study is that images add a dimension of information not available solely through the printed word, and that visual information is processed differently from verbal information resulting in higher quality ethical reasoning. The hypothesis that visual information has the power to affect ethical reasoning was borne out by these studies.

Rather than discussing ethical issues without benefit of visual images, journalists may now be made aware of the effect of visuals on their ethical decisions. They can ask if there are photographs of the people in the story the ethical question revolves around. Mid- and top-level editors can be made aware that their decisions may be improved by considering all the evidence - including the visual evidence. Furthermore, consciously choosing to include visual evidence in decision-making routines is simple and inexpensive, and imminently easier to manipulate than some of the other variables found to affect ethical reasoning such as age, education, newsroom socialization, and organization ownership. Incorporating visual evidence into routine, decision-making processes requires little more than awareness, a few requests, and a small investment of time. Yet, it may be one giant step toward improving the quality of journalists' ethical reasoning that also may help improve the outcome that audiences see and critique.

FOOTNOTE

1. Since Gilligan (1982) raised the question of Kohlberg's ethical theory and bias against women, it has become conventional to explore gender differences even though none are expected. While women scored higher on ethical reasoning in the first study and men scored higher in the second, the differences were not statistically significant. (Study 1: Female M = 18.57, s.d. = 6.16. Male M = 18.03, s.d. = 5.39. Study 2: Female M = 18.9, s.d. = 5.86; Male M = 19.64, s.d. = 6.3). In fact, in more than 90% of the studies using the DIT, no significant gender differences have been found (Rest, 1979). The studies that do find significant differences consistently show women scoring higher than men (Thomas, 1986). It appears that Rest's instrument, while based on Kohlberg's theory, does a better job of fairly representing women's ethic of care than Kohlberg's instrument. One reason may be that Kohlberg did not include women in development of his test, but Rest did.

APPENDIX

The text for the ethical dilemmas is reprinted below. The photographs are copyrighted, but can be obtained from the author.

Prostitution and Drugs

Cliff Jackson, a newspaper photojournalist, has been doing a story about an area of town that has become home to prostitutes and drug dealers. Tina Williams, like many of these prostitutes, is addicted to crack. She tried to get help by signing up for an in-patient drug rehab program, but the waiting list is two years long. While she waits, Tina supports herself and her habit by servicing clients on the couch in her one-room apartment, as one of the photos shows. Tina gave Jackson permission to photograph her, and she has seen the photo and agreed to its publication. Since then, however, Tina's sister has heard about the photo and called to ask Jackson not to use it. Should the newspaper run the photo?

Elder Abuse

Pete Stevens, a newspaper photojournalist, is investigating patient abuse by home health providers – private agencies that send health workers into homes to do everything from housecleaning to semi-skilled nursing. The Better Business Bureau has logged multiple complaints about patient neglect and abuse and so has the state nursing home board, but they lack authority to act. The District Attorney tells Stevens that while his office has begun a criminal investigation, it has been stymied by a lack of evidence or by frail or elderly witnesses who may be unconvincing in court. Stevens is urged to pursue the story, the officials involved agreeing to release public documents and talk to him on the record. Harold Mitchell, an elderly in-home patient who was a victim of neglect and abuse, agreed to let him take pictures. Mitchell has seen the photo and given Stevens permission to run it. Since then, however, Mitchell's adult children have heard about the photo and called to ask Stevens not to run it. Should the newspaper run the photo?

Kids Playing "Junkie"

Lauren Gray, a newspaper photojournalist, has been working on a story in an area of town frequented by drug dealers and addicts. She has a compelling photograph to go with a story on the effects of drugs on children. The photo shows two children, Mary, age 5, and her 3-year-old brother, Jimmy, whose parents are addicts. The parents think their children don't see what they do, but as one of the photos shows, the children play a game called "junkie" that imitates their parents' drug use. The photo was taken in a public alley, and Mary and Jimmy's parents gave Gray permission to take pictures of the children for publication. Since then, however, the children's grandmother has heard about the photo and called the newsroom to ask that Gray not run the photo. There are mixed opinions in the newsroom. Should the paper run the photo?

Domestic Violence

Robin Meyers, a newspaper photojournalist, has been working on a story about domestic abuse among middle- and upper-class women. Most people think that spouse abuse only happens to women who are poor, but in this city, an increasing number of women married to important businessmen are showing up at emergency rooms with signs of battering. One night when Meyers is at a hospital where she has permission to take photos, Angela Langley, the wife of a local developer, comes in. As a sheriff's deputy takes a photo for evidence, Langley encourages Meyers to take her picture saying she wants people to see that if it could happen to her, it could happen to them, too. She signs Meyers' consent form. A few days later, she decides not to press charges. Her sister calls and asks Meyers not to use the photo. Opinions in the newsroom are mixed. Should the paper run the photo?

Homeless Families

Robin Meyers, a newspaper photojournalist, has been working on a story about homeless families. The Glenn's are typical of what she found. When Michael Glenn can find work, the parents and their two children stay in one of the cheap, dirty motels frequented by prostitutes. The rest of the time, they live in their van. Dinner for Katie, 6, and Jonathan, 5, is often a bowl of cereal, as one of the photos shows. The Glenn's gave Meyers permission to take pictures of their children for publication. Since then, however, a teacher at the school the children sometimes attend has heard about the photo and called the newsroom to ask that Meyers not run it. There are mixed opinions in the newsroom. Should the paper run the photo?

SOURCES

Baron, R.M. & Kenny, D.A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.

Barry, A.M. (1997). *Visual intelligence; Perception, image, and manipulation in visual communication*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Basil, M.D. (1996). The use of student samples in communication research. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 40:431-440.

Batra, R. & Ray, M. (1983). Operationalizing involvement as depth and quality of cognitive response. In R. Bagozzi & A. Tybout (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (pp. 309-313). Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research.

Beam, R. (1993). The impact of group ownership variables on organizational professionalism at daily newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 70, 907-918.

Beam, R. (1990). Journalistic professionalism as an organizational-level concept, *Journalism Monographs*, 121.

Berger, A.A. (1998). *Seeing is believing*, 2nd ed. MountainView, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co.

Berlyne, D.E. (1963).Complexity and incongruity variables as determinants of exploratory choice and evaluative ratings. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 17, 274-290.

Biocca, F. (Ed.) 1991. *Television and political advertising, Vol. 1: Psychological processes.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bohle, R. H. & Garcia, M. R. (1987) Reader response to color halftones and spot color in newspaper design. *Journalism Quarterly*, 64: 731-739.

Bolch, J. (2001). Personal communication with former managing editor, The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer, May 10.

Borden, S.L. (1996). Choice processes in a newspaper ethics case. *Communication Monographs*, 64, 65-81.

Bower, G.H., Black, J.B. & Turner, T.J. (1979). Scripts in text comprehension and memory. *Cognitive Psychology*, 11, 177-220.

Breed, W. (1955). Social control in the newsroom. *Social Forces*, 33, 326-35.

Brosius, H.B. (1993). The effects of emotional pictures in television news, *Communication Research*, 20, 105-124.

Burgoon, J.K. (1980). Nonverbal communication research in the 1970Õs: An overview. In D. Nimmo (Ed), *Communication Yearbook IV* (pp. 179-197). N.J.: Transaction Books.

Cacioppo, J.T. & Petty, R.E. (1981). Social psychological procedures for cognitive response assessment: The thought-listing technique. In T. Merluzzi, C. Glass, & M. Genest (Eds.), *Cognitive assessment* (pp. 114-138). New York: Guilford.

Campbell, D.T. & Stanley, J.C. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Coleman, R. & Wilkins, L. (2002). Searching for the ethical journalist: An exploratory study of newsworkers' ethical development. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, in press.

Courtright, J.A. (1996). Rationally thinking about nonprobability. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 40: 414-421.

Culbertson, H. (1974). Visual detail, sensationalism and perceived writer stand, *Journalism Quarterly*, 51, 79-86.

Freedberg, D. (1989). *The power of images: Studies in the history and theory of response.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Friedman, A. (1979). Framing pictures: The role of knowledge in automatized encoding and memory for gist. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 108, 316-335.

Garcia, M. & Stark, P. (1991). *Eyes on the news*. St. Petersburg, Fla.: Poynter Institute for Media Studies.

Gibson, R. & Zillmann, D. (2000). Reading between the photographs: The influence of incidental pictoral information on issue perception. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(2):355-366.

Gibson, R., Zillmann, D. & Sargent, S. (1999). Effects of photographs in news-magazine reports on issue perception. *Media Psychology*, 1(3):207-228.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goldberg, V. (1991). *The power of photography: How photographs changed our lives.* New York: Abbeville Publishing Group.

Graber, D.A. (1990). Seeing is remembering: How visuals contribute to learning from television news. *Journal of Communication,* 40, 134-155.

Grimes, T. & Drechsel, R. (1996). Word-Picture Juxtaposition, schemata, and defamation in television news. *Journalism & Mass Comm Quarterly*, 73(1): 169-180.

Higgins, E. T.. (1996). Knowledge activation: Accessibility, applicability, and salience. In E.T. Higgins & A.W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 133-168). New York: Guilford Press.

Hsia, H.J. (1971). The information processing capacity of modality and channel performance. *AV Communication Review*, 19, 51-75.

Huh, H.L. (1994) The effect of newspaper picture size, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 1(2): 14-15.

Husselbee, P. & Adams, A. (1996). Seeking instructional value: Publication of disturbing images in small community newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 17(3/4):39-52.

Katz, E., Adoni, H. & Parness, P. (1977). Remembering the news: What the picture adds to recall. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54,2, 231-239.

Kohlberg, L. (1969). State and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization. In E. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Kosslyn, S.M. (1983). *Ghosts in the mind' machine: Creating and using images in the brain*. New York: Norton.

Lang, A. (1996). The logic of using inferential statistics with experimental data from nonprobability samples: Inspired by Cooper, Dupagne, Potter, and Sparks. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 40: 422-430.

Lester, P.M. (2000). *Visual communication: Images with messages*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Levin, J.R. & Divine-Hawkins, P. (1974). Visual imagery as a prose-learning process. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 6:23-30.

Lewis, C.D. (1984). Reporting for television. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lodge, M., McGraw, K.M. & Stroh, P. (1989). An impression-driven model of candidate evaluation. *American Political Science Review*, 83, 399-419.

Loftus, G.E. & Mackworth, N.H. (1978). Cognitive determinants of fixation location during picture viewing. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 4, 565-572.

Madigan, S. (1983). Picture memory, In J.C. Yuille (Ed.), *Imagery, memory and cognition: Essays in honor of Allan Paivio*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Maier, S.R. (2000). Do trade publications affect ethical sensitivity in newsrooms? *Newspaper Research Journal*, 21(1): 41-50.

McCombs, M.E., Mauro, J.B. & Son, J. (1988). Predicting newspaper readership from content characteristics: A replication. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 10(1):25-30.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Newhagen, J.E. & Reeves, B. (1992). This evening' bad news: Effects of compelling television news images on memory. *Journal of Communication*, 42, 25-41.

Nunnally, J.C. & Lemond, L.C. (1973). Exploratory behavior and human development. In H.W. Reese (Ed.), *Advances in child development and behavior*. New York: Academic Press.

Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual coding approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Paivio, A. (1983). The empirical case for dual coding. In. J.C. Yuille (Ed.), *Imagery, memory and cognition* (pp. 307-332). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Perse, E.M. (1990). Audience selectivity and involvement in the newer media environment. *Communication Research*, 17(5):675-697.

Petty, R.E. & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986a). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental and social psychology, Vol. 19* (pp. 124-206). New York: Academic Press.

Petty, R.E. & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986b). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Petty, R.E., Cacioppo, J.T. & Goldman, R. (1981). Personal involvement as a determinant of argument-based persuasion. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 41(5):847-855.

Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child.* New York: The Free Press. (Originally published in 1932).

Reese, S.D. (1984). Visual-verbal redundancy effects on television news learning. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 28, 79-87.

Rest, J.R., Narvaez, D., Bebeau, M.J. & Thoma, S.J. (1999). *Postconventional moral thinking: A neo-Kohlbergian approach.* Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Rest, J.R. (1979). *Development in judging moral issues*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Rest, J.R. (1983). Morality. In P.H. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology, Vol. III Cognitive Development*, (pp. 556-629), New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Rest, J.R. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory*. New York: Praeger.

Salmon, C. (1986). Perspectives on involvement in consumer and communication research. In B. Dervin & M. Voigt (Eds.), *Progress in communication sciences* (pp. 243-269). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Severin, W.J. (1976). Pictures as relevant cues in multi-channel communication, *Journalism Quarterly*, 44, 17-22, 52.

Shapiro, M. A. (1994). Think-aloud and thought-list procedures in investigating mental processes. in Lang, A. (Ed.), *Measuring psychological responses to media messages* (pp. 1-14). Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Singletary, M.W., Caudill, S., Caudill, E. & White, A. (1990). Motives for ethical decision-making. *Journalism Quarterly*, 67(4): 964-972.

Sontag, S. (1977). *On photography*. New York: Anchor Books.

Stempel, G.H. III & Westley, B.H. (Eds.) (1981). *Research methods in mass communication* . Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Voakes, P.S. (1998). What were you thinking? A survey of journalists who were sued for invasion of privacy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2): 378-393.

Voakes, P.S. (1997). Public perceptions of journalists' ethical motivations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 74(1):23-38.

Wanta, W. (1988). The effects of dominant photographs: An agenda-setting experiment. *Journalism Quarterly*, 65, 107-111.

Westbrook, T.L. (1995). The cognitive moral development of journalists: Distribution and implications for news production. Unpublished dissertation, University of Texas at Austin. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A, Vol 56(3-A).

White, H.A. (1996). The salience and pertinence of ethics: When journalists do and don't think for themselves. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73(1): 17-28.

White, H.A. & Pearce, R.C. (1991). Validating an ethical motivations scale: Convergence and predictive ability. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 68(3): 455-464.

White, H.A. & Singletary, M.W. (1993). Internal work motivation: Predictor of using ethical heuristics and motivations. *Journalism Quarterly*, 70(2): 381-392.

Wicks, R. (1995). Remembering the news: effects of medium and message discrepancy on news recall over time. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72(3): 666-681.

Wicks,R.H. (1992). Improvement over time in recall of media information: An exploratory study. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 36, 287-302.

Rwanda, news media, and genocide:

Towards a research agenda for reviewing the ethics and professional standards of journalists covering conflict

By Kevin R. Kemper and Michael Jonathan Grinfeld

University of Missouri-Columbia

For Media Ethics Division of AEJMC 2002

For inquiries please contact:
Kevin R. Kemper
478 Chris Drive
Columbia, MO 65203
kevinrkemper@hotmail.com
krkvw5@mizzou.edu
573-256-5486

The authors would like to thank Professors Glen Cameron, Stephanie Craft, and Richard Reuben at the University of Missouri-Columbia, among many others, for their thoughtful insights.

Rwanda, news media, and genocide: Towards a research agenda for reviewing the ethics and professional standards of journalists covering conflict

Introduction

"The grave is only half full. Who will help us fill it?"

Is this impassioned media rhetoric during the emotional turmoil of civil war, or hate-filled propaganda that fueled the killing of nearly a million innocent civilians during a modern-day massacre? Those two sentences, allegedly broadcast by Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and cited in Keane's book about Rwandan genocide (1995), typified the disturbing attitudes that infiltrated Rwandan media during the crisis in 1994. Did journalists, then, help to fill those graves through biased, dishonest, inhumane, or otherwise unprofessional reporting?

For Rwandan journalists Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean Bosco Barayagwiza, Hassan Ngeze, and Georges Ruggiu, the answers to those questions will emerge as they face rare and controversial criminal charges. They have the dubious distinction of being only the second group of journalists ever tried by an international war crimes tribunal (cf. Seib, 2002, p. 88; Cases of Prosecutor v. Nahimana, Barayagwiza, Ngeze, & Ruggiu, www.ictr.org). As Seib (2002, p. 88) noted, the only other case involved German Julius Streicher, who was convicted by the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal for "incitement to murder and extermination" of Jews while publishing an anti-Semitic newspaper.

Already imprisoned for five years, the Rwandan defendants face continued prosecution as of the writing of this paper, though already the tribunal has convicted one of them. Ruggiu, a Belgian national, pled guilty to direct and public incitement to commit genocide and a crime against humanity while working for Rwanda's Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines, which was operated by supporters of President Habyarimana. Ruggiu was sentenced to twelve years in prison (cf. Seib, 2002, p. 88; Prosecutor v. Ruggiu). By the time the killing stopped, an estimated five hundred thousand to one million people perished (Prunier, 1995, pp. 261-265), though not all the killings were attributed to the incendiary broadcasts.

Ironically, the United States had the opportunity to jam radio broadcasts (Metzl, 1997, p. 629), the medium deemed most often used and effective at inciting genocidal behaviors (Kellow & Steeves, 1998, pp. 115-117). But the U.S. officials ultimately decided not to interfere, in part because of concerns that they would violate international law (Metzl, 1997, p. 629).

Whatever the outcome of the trials against the remaining defendants, since journalists rarely faced war crimes in the past half century its not presently likely that the Rwandan example will open the floodgates. Nevertheless, despite being an obvious outlier, there are lessons to be learned from it, and issues left unresolved that beg for further evaluation and analysis.

Whether they like it or not, or whether they intend to or not, what journalists write has a profound impact on conflict. Technological advances have eliminated land boundaries, with journalists' work being transmitted around the planet in nanoseconds, accessible over a 24-hour news cycle to seven billion people. At times, the line between propaganda and journalism is blurred. What a journalist does in Israel, for example, immediately could impact decision-makers in Washington.

The intrinsic nature of conflicts, especially violent ones, has evolved over the past two decades, and the risks to human existence have arguably even surpassed the anxiety-drenched Cold War years. The proliferation of a variety of weapons of mass destruction, the apparent willingness of increasingly hostile groups to use them, and the spreading popularity of terrorism as a tactic are pressing examples. While the reasons for this escalating pattern are complex, one motive is grounded in delivering "the message," and to do that the media is drawn to the center of the conflicts.

Using the Rwandan crisis and genocide as a framework for discussion, this paper argues that modern journalists could benefit from clearer ethical guidelines when covering conflict. The authors decline to view "the media" as a monolith, and recognize instead that journalism throughout the world represents an enormous spectrum of practices and norms. The authors agree that the conduct attributed to the Rwandan journalists likely would fall outside the boundaries of a vast majority of journalists throughout the world. Nevertheless, this extreme model provides a useful context in which to revisit the ethical standards when covering violent conflict.

To support these ideas, this paper will include a theoretical framework and literature review about conflict and its coverage, as well as a discussion of the ethical implications for those covering conflict. The authors reserve for a later time developing recommendations that changes in the conduct of journalists. Rather, the authors hope to frame and spark a research agenda for the ethics of covering conflict. The authors hope that over time a well-explicated paradigm could be developed by a variety of interested researcher, so journalists and journalism students could better learn cover conflict in a way that is constructive and that avoids unintended harm.

Theoretical framework and literature review

Conflict is *"perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously"* (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994, p. 5). Conflict has both positive and negative qualities. Rubin, Pruitt & Kim argue, "conflict is.the seedbed that nourishes social change," may "facilitate the reconciliation of people's legitimate interests," or promote "group unity" (pp. 7-8). However, "conflict is fully capable of wreaking havoc on society" (p. 8). The authors believe that, based upon current research, there is a plausible media effect on conflict across-the-board, including conflict initiation, escalation, de-escalation or resolution. However, there is a distinction between conflict theory and conflict resolution theory, as well as between conflict initiation and escalation. So, a research agenda into the ethics of covering conflict would need to differentiate between these various concepts and theories. Also, researchers need to be cautious about causality. Though the authors are qualitative in their research, they agree that further investigation and testing with controlled experiments would better quantify the potential causality of journalism on aspects of conflict. However, this paper presupposes that the effects exist at whatever levels.

Since the beginning, journalists considered conflict to be an important component of newsworthiness. Wars, marital disputes, school board controversies, criminal trials, etc., make headlines and fill the pages and airwaves. Even the sports pages are framed in conflict in ways that reach beyond the ordinary competition between teams, such as when one boxer bites off the ear of another, or when an athlete is accused of rape.

Several mass communication theories refer to this notion of conflict, including the prospect that reporting can affect its course. Media effects theory is well-known in quantitative literature.

> There is no longer discussion in that (media effects) literature about whether the media have effects or not; nor is our field as interested in identifying the different effects that media do have. Instead, most current research attempts to improve our understanding of media effects by refining our theoretical explanations of the processes by which media effects occur (Perse, 2001, p. 1).

In turn, if journalists can have an effect on the course or outcome of conflict, then there must also be an annexed concern for the ethical implications of their reporting.

One impact may be agenda-setting, which means "that the mass media simply by the fact of paying attention to some issues and neglecting others will have an effect on public opinion" (McQuail & Windhal, 1993, pp. 104-110). Wanta and Demaske (1999) studied newspaper coverage of an anti-gay rights group. Newspaper use influenced opposition to the group (p. 1). They also saw a second level of agenda setting, whereby the public linked attributes to individuals in the news. If the media portrays a group with certain attributes, the public buys into those attributes.

This could affect levels of conflict, especially if the media attribute negative characteristics to a group, and the public then decides to act negatively towards that group. This could also partially explain how Radio Mille Collines allegedly was able to influence genocide, as an agenda apparently was set for Hutus to kill Tutsis. Also, Wanta and Hu (1993) found that stories about international conflict involving the United States have one of the strongest degrees of agenda-setting influence (p. 250). However, one result was troubling, especially when considered in the light of the coverage of the Rwandan genocide:

> In addition, two news categories – international trade not involving the United States, and politics not involving the United States – correlated negatively with public concern for two off the news media (in question). This results suggests that press coverage, besides increasing public concern with certain issues, can also *decrease* concern (p. 250).

This was troubling because a decreased concern in international situations could influence policymakers to ignore genocide and other pernicious problems.

A related notion to agenda setting is framing. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) looked at five common news frames – "attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality" – and their affects on framing European politics. It makes sense that many stories are framed or structured as a conflict story – police versus criminal, nature versus mankind, government versus government, Democrat versus Republican. This framing of conflict is the underlying premise of "the conflict-knowledge hypothesis" posited by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980).

> This hypothesis assumes that conflict is a regular, predictable outcome of organization among countervailing groups participating in social action and that conflict is a stimulator of communication and interest in the issue. So as conflict and communication rise, there should be a resultant increase in familiarity with the issue in question and with knowledge about various facets of the issue (p. 141).

Drake and Donohue (1996) called for conflict resolution theory to be linked to communicative framing theory. Of course, conflict resolution theory is somewhat different than conflict theory, just like media framing theory may be somewhat different from communicative framing theory. However, there are strong possibilities in exploring how framing may influence the direction of the conflict being covered. This was the general direction of *Framing Friction: Media and Social Conflict* (1999), a compilation of articles edited by Meander that highlight how media frame conflict. Wall (1997) used framing analysis to evaluate the U.S. news magazines coverage of the Bosnian and Rwandan killings, noting that "(t)he news magazines characterized Bosnia's violence as an aberration for Europeans, while Rwanda's violence was presented as typical of Africans" (p. 411). If Wall's findings are correct, it would stand to reason that U.S. journalists may need guidance in how to frame stories without undue bias. This idea seems to be supported by Entman and Rojecki (1993), who said, "We find several kinds of judgments apparently made by journalists that filter into the news and, in turn, likely affect the movement's ability to build consensus and mobilize participation" (p. 155). This lends credence to the idea that the Rwandan radio journalists were able to affect a political movement. Such a conclusion also makes common sense.

Intuitively, the authors see agenda setting and framing – which can be alternately considered similar and dissimilar – as intentional or unintentional. That is, some journalists may intend to set an agenda, while others may not. This leads to a discussion of the role of the journalist in the agenda setting and framing process. One would assume that journalists sometimes take an active role, though some effects are unintentional or not obvious. The civic journalist, who may take the stance that the journalist in a community must work with others to solve common problems, could easily decide to influence conflict with his or her work. It makes sense that a civic journalist would be concerned with helping to solve community conflict.

Campbell (2000) does examine civic journalism's role in public conflict. "Civic journalism can provide the public sphere in which conflict resolution can move from individual rights-based models toward public judgment models, where 'the good life' might be realized" (p. 1). The definition of civic, or public, journalism offered by Campbell could help in the discussion about covering conflict: "Public journalists see ordinary citizens as perfectly capable of good decision-making; these journalists understand their roles as facilitators of dialogue among various and diverse segments of the population, across race and class lines, among public and private organizations" (p. 2). Suffice it to say that Radio Mille Collines did not function in this way, as it acted as an instigator instead of a facilitator in the conflict.

But this idea of civic journalism as a paradigm for helping solve conflict has its critics. For instance, Patterson (1997), using arguments from Lippman (1922), says that news professionals and organizations are not "effective political actor(s)" (p. 445).

> In carrying out this function (of news) properly, the press contributes to informed public opinion. However, politics is more a question of values than of information. To act on their interests, citizens must arrive at an understanding of the relationship between their values and those at stake in public policy. Political institutions are designed to help citizens make this connection. The press is not. (p. 445).

A theory that may relate to the question is Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976, 1989) dependency model. This supposes that the more dependent the consumer is upon the media, the more consumers can be aroused, which makes logical sense. Then they are more involved in information processing, which leads to "cognitive, affective and behavioural effects from the media" (McQuail and Windhal, 1993, p. 113). This affective arousal could be similar to the augmented conflict spiral model, which conflict theorists believe may explain how conflict escalates (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994, p. 77). Kellow and Steeves (1998) connected the media dependency model, as well as collective reaction effects (pp. 108-109), to the broadcasts of Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines in Rwanda (pp. 109-111).

Walker (1990) looked at gratifications of media use in the context of a conflict. Perhaps the Rwandan people found particular use and gratification in using the radio broadcasts to bolster ethnic hatred already in their hearts.

Structural-pluralism is another plausible theory to understand coverage of conflict. Harry (2001) said:

> How the news media cover social conflict is strongly influenced by the nature of the community, or social structure, in which the media operate. This is the essence of the well-known structural-pluralism hypothesis: The more diverse or pluralistic the range of power-brokers in a community, the more these sources will openly argue their positions given a certain dispute, and the more will local media report these conflicts (p. 419).

Harry tested this with a study of how a big city newspaper and a small-town newspaper covered the same environmental controversy. He borrowed heavily from Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, who wrote *Community Conflict & the Press* (1980), a book with implications for framing. Demers (1998) is another pertinent study involving structural-pluralism, but it does not seem as specific as Harry (2000) in isolating conflict.

To understand the coverage of conflict, one must understand the different conceptualizations of the press. The "four theories of the press" –

authoritarianism, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist -- were explicated by Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm (1956). This was updated and challenged by Nerone et al. in *Last rights: Revisiting four theories of the press* (1995). The most pertinent of the four theories to this discussion is social responsibility theory, which says "that the power and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly presented and that the public has enough information to decide; and that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it" (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956, p. 5). However, one of the criticisms of this theory is the last phrase about another agency enforcing social responsibility upon the press. This concept has significant implications for freedom of expression still coveted by the U.S. press, and for evolving media infrastructure in developing or transitioning nations. Still, social responsibility theory informs coverage of conflict because it can "raise conflict to the plane of discussion" (p. 7). Regardless, any of the four theories could be used as a theoretical framework for discussing the ethics of covering conflict.

An important question for American journalists, at least, is whether the traditional values of objectivity and independence must be conceptualized differently. If they have become "players" in conflict—that is, they are vested with an intrinsic interest and/or a role in the course of its outcome—then what criteria should govern their conduct? And even if they don't have a direct interest, they at least can recognize they have the potential to significantly influence the overall outcome. "Among the vast array of entities, formal and informal, enduring and ad hoc, that can become involved in public conflicts within and among nations, the one constant, whose very existence is defined by conflict participation, is the news media organization" (Arno, 1984, p. 231).

The second author argues that all journalists are players at some level, while the first author would prefer to think of journalists as observers who unwittingly or cautiously could be players. Yet, Seib (2002) argues:

> Journalists' claims that they have not interest in outcomes are disingenuous. As a practical matter, objectivity is an illusion; choices about what to cover, as well as how to cover, are not made in a moral vacuum. Why bother doing journalism if there is not intent to provide the information that will affect how people think about things? (p. 8).

So an underlying premise of this study is that all journalists are players to a certain degree, and therefore may have increased ethical obligations in their reporting. The authors urge a discussion about the ethics of conflict, regardless of the framework employed. Conflict is a growing but still underdeveloped area of mass communication research. Based upon current research, this paper assumes that media can affect the course or outcome of conflict, whether they realize it or not.

Ethical discussion

If media have effects, then what are the ethical implications of those effects? Ethics and professional standards must be an integral part of effects research, as well as a logical extension of it, because it is not enough to just know what happens. Ethicists and journalists need to determine specific ways in which journalists' conduct should be affected. For instance, in Perse's otherwise exceptional book about media effects (2001), the only overt mention of ethics per se seemed to be a stray comment about the ethics of conducting effects research (p. 10). Also, certain American journalists express the value that they will not write articles that could affect the safety of U.S. troops on combat missions. But should they also resist stories that affect the safety of the enemy's soldiers to maintain their fairness, objectivity, and independence?

Seib (2002) offers some advice for those who had covered Rwanda, noting that despite good intentions, the broader picture of the horrors were not reported.

> Would faster and more thorough coverage of Rwanda by more news organizations have saved lives? That is impossible to answer with certainty, but it might have. Even a slim possibility that news reports might mitigate such a tragedy is reason enough for the news business to reexamine its commitment to coverage of this kind of story (p. 77).

The common ethical paradigms for journalists partially inform the issue of covering conflict, but more specific exploration needs to be done. Patterson and Wilkins' well-known text on media ethics (2002) quotes from several seminal sources and offers concise explanations of major ethical paradigms used by journalists, including Bok's Model, Aristotle's Golden Mean, deontology, utilitarianism, social responsibility theory, etc. (pp. 1-15). Interestingly, all of these ethical paradigms can inform a discussion about the ethics of covering conflict. For instance, Bok's Model asks, "How will my action affect others?" (Bok, 1978, as indirectly cited in Patterson & Wilkins, 2002, p. 3). Aristotle's Golden Mean posits that "(v)irtue lies at the mean between the extremes" (Patterson & Wilkins, 2002, p. 7). Kant and the subsequent notions of deontology imply that you "treat humanity as an end, never a means only" (p. 9). Utilitarianism could be considered as "the greatest good for the greatest number" (p. 9), but Patterson and Wilkins think that this concept "has led to an overly mechanistic application of the principle…" (p. 9). They also refer to Ross, who proposed a "duty of not *injuring others*" (p. 11).

So, commonly accepted ethical paradigms imply application to covering conflict. However, this paper argues that synthesis needs to occur between those ethical paradigms and established academic research so a more pointed code of ethics could be developed for those who cover conflict.

In an early step towards that direction, Mowlana (1984) proposed four principles in "an international code of ethics" for those who cover conflict (pp. 34-35). In summary, they included:

1. Prevention of war and promotion of peace
2. Respect for culture, tradition and values
3. Promotion of human rights and dignity
4. Preserve human association in the context of the home, family, and community (pp. 34-35).

While this code of ethics sounds inviting, the problem is what is missing. For instance, part of the problem in Rwanda was that "(m)edia had been a pawn of the political and ethnic strife since the beginning of the war in 1990" (Kellow &

Steeves, 1998, p. 116). Therefore, a press without autonomy, especially under the control of then President Habyarimna, seemed more likely to be one-sided in ethnic conflict. Extreme loyalty, whether it be to marauding gangs or to despotic governments, raises the question of "whether an ethical person can be loyal to an unethical cause, for example racism or genocide" (Patterson & Wilkins, 2002, p. 72). Autonomy could be a key concept in the building of an ethical paradigm for covering conflict.

Another related problem confronting journalists covering conflict, which was alluded to when Mowlana (1984) operationalized his proposed code of ethics, is overt nationalism. Wall (1997), in examining U.S. newsmagazine coverage of Rwanda and Bosnia, concluded for the Rwanda example:

> By suggesting that irrational tribalism was causing tribal violence, the magazines established a circular pattern of reasoning, quite different from the linear historical explanation found in the Bosnia stories. Instead of being portrayed as following a rational plan of action, Rwandans were portrayed as irrational, savages trapped in an unbreakable cycle of violence whose inner workings count not be explained but were sensationalized through biblical imagery, which dehumanized the people involved and perpetuated American racial stereotypes. Just as with the Cold War frame, these differences in coverage suggest that the media portrayals of similar sorts of violence occurring in different parts of the world do not so much reflect reality as they do both American policy (or the lack of) and American attitudes and biases toward non-Western peoples and places (p. 425).

Some may be troubled by Mowlana's (1984) continued use of "promote" in his proscriptions for covering conflict (pp. 34-35). While some may not have a problem with using journalism to "promote" something, other journalists may simply want to observe and report. However, this paper argues that by properly observing, sound values are promoted. For instance, a journalist who "gets the story right," who interviews all of the players, who takes into account the historical context of a story, who exercises all of the characteristics of professionalism, likely will "promote" human rights, peace, etc., simply by doing a good job.

The problem of objectivity was somewhat addressed by Vincent (2000), who conducted a narrative analysis of the U.S. press coverage of the Kosovo War. He concluded:

> Many articles, editorials and op ed pieces appeared in the elite US press and took issue with the notion that American journalists might not be best prepared to adequately report news from many parts of the world. The debate is obviously still relevant, and, as this study helps demonstrate, the belief that the US press has the ability to offer an objective and unbiased report may be a myth of the profession. Instead, the US media demonstrated that it was quite vulnerable to serving as an organ of political propaganda and putting national interests over the higher quest for truth and objectivity. It is our hope that the US media can learn from this lesson and begin to explore ways to broaden its discourse and better serve its public (pp. 340-341).

Seib (2002) also offers related guidance towards ethics and covering conflict:

> There is no precise formula for establishing intellectual independence, but part of the task for news organizations is to rely less on governments' priorities and take a more proactive approach when evaluating events around the world. This entails not just being more knowledgeable but also having a more sophisticated appreciation of the responsibilities of journalism as profession and the ethical duties of journalists individually (p. 3).

Vincent (2000) and Seib's (2002) work remind journalists that objectivity is still a focus of discussion. Seib goes further to outline four possible ethical guidelines, though they do not adequately account for issues of objectivity and autonomy.

> "First is the basic duty to inform, and especially to inform a broad audience. ...
> "Second, decisions about what to report and what to withhold are important not only as they relate to stories' newsworthiness, but also in terms of the effects of such decisions. ...
> "Third, tone of coverage is important. ...
> "Fourth, journalists should recognize that their coverage may affect opinion and policy" (pp. 3-4).

The first guideline sounds deontological, in that it calls for adherence to duty, while the concerns about effect seem to be utilitarian. It might be better to choose one or the other paradigm, though it is plausible to use both since they each have some validity. Mowlana's (1984) proscriptions are also utilitarian; though it could be argued that peace, human rights, etc., are duties. This seems to support older paradigms, but ethicists could better account for increased technology, among other issues, with newer paradigms.

Ozgunes and Terzis (2000), in interviews with certain players in the conflict between Greece and Turkey, highlight certain issues that could inform an ethical discussion. They include "commercialization of the media, changes in media ownership, the interlocking interests between the media, politicians and the business sector, the inherent media ideology and culture and the new media format and technologies as the main restraints for a resolution-oriented coverage of the Greek-Turkish conflict" (p. 405).

Vincent (1998) approached a similar question with the "troubles" in Northern Ireland and the coverage of that conflict by Irish print media, but he used computer-assisted content analyses. He concluded:

> By using certain language and focusing on particular issues, it appears that the press has the power to help promote community dialogue and potentially resolve conflicts. At the moment, however, stronger efforts are needed, since the newspapers examined often reflect the biases of particular communities and readerships they serve (p. 495).

Despite moving in a much-needed direction, a problem with Vincent's (1998) and Ozgunes and Terzis' studies is that they insinuate causality but do not utilize experimentation, a methodology better suited to support causality. The authors hope that ethics for covering conflict will be built upon better methodological foundations.

Growing technology is another important variable in understanding the ethics of covering conflict, as journalism's technology may have outstripped its ethical capacity to manage it constructively, particularly within the context of conflict. As Steve Livingston said:

> Journalism is beginning to take on the character of intelligence gathering because of the technological prowess that is available now to open sources, to people with the technology to do it. This is publicly available on the Web. You can get information about American troop deployments, fleet deployments, whatever the case may be, and it becomes a challenge to figure out how journalism is to face its responsibilities to inform the public (Seib, 2002, p. 71).

One of the most controversial questions could be the extent to which journalists should help solve conflict. For example, Arno proposes that the news media organization serve as a third party (p. 232) to help resolve conflict. Arno quotes Schellenberg (1982) in proposing three specific roles: mediator, arbitrator, or adjudicator. Conflict theorists have recognized media as third parties. "When the risks seem too great for back-channel meetings, or when it is impossible for the parties to make direct contact, third parties can sometimes be used for problem solving" (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994, pp. 189-190). Rubin, Pruitt & Kim then quote Young (1968) about American journalist John Scali who served as a message carrier between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis. Would it have been better for Scali to have stayed out of the conflict, which could have escalated to World War III and nuclear annihilation, or did he do the right thing by carrying messages? Regardless, the authors argue that Scali was a player, regardless of what he did, because what he did or did not do had an effect on the conflict.

Many journalists may reject the idea of taking an active role in helping to resolve conflict, but those journalists could heed the advice of Arno (1984):

> Whichever of these roles the third party plays in helping to manage or resolve conflict – and in some circumstances the roles may be combined with one another – there is an underlying assumption that he or she must be fair and unbiased. Autonomy is the critical issue, therefore, because the third party tied to either side may be prejudiced (p. 232).

Remember the story of the Rwandan radio journalists now charged with genocide: They took the side of President Habyarimana and his regime, and they were unabashed in their hatred of the Tutsis. They are now accused of instigating the killings of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, according to the U.N. War Crimes Tribunal. What would have happened if journalists had used their craft to expose the underlying currents of hatred and to look for solutions to the problems that the African country faced?

To answer questions such as these, relevant issues that should be analyzed include autonomy, objectivity, nationalism, intergenerational racism and ethnic hatred, technology, and many others that ethicists and journalists could conceive.

Conclusion

A research agenda for the ethics of covering conflict needs to account for current literature in conflict theory and mass communication, established ethical paradigms, and various theories of press systems, among other concepts. The authors hope that ethicists from as many traditions as possible – including quantitative and qualitative epistemologies – would focus upon this needed area of research.

It is recognized that current ethical guidelines for covering conflict tend to be rooted in social responsibility theory, and this seems to be the most promising area of the future. Many journalists and journalism educators today at least accept some of the aspects of social responsibility theory, though they may not call it that. Journalists know their work makes a difference; that is often why journalists do journalism.

In the 20th Century, journalists covered innumerable conflicts, including two world wars. The current trial of journalists like those at Radio Mille Collines will determine whether they were willing to use the mass media to incite mass murder. Could competing journalists have prevented that outcome? If mainstream, professional journalists cover such an event, could the effects be mitigated or even eliminated? Could the press have kept the Rwandan genocide from occurring?

The authors do not propose that journalists be co-opted by sources or institutional concerns, or that journalists reject the traditional notions of objectivity. The authors simply believe that, because of increased technology and world conflict, journalists are increasingly effective in affecting the course and outcome of conflict, whether they intend to or not. To the extent journalists are also members of local, regional, national and world communities, will taking a more assertive role in constructively managing conflict undermine traditional values of fairness, objectivity and independence?

The implications for this ethical discussion go beyond conflict. For instance, as egregious as the charges are against the Rwandan journalists accused of inciting genocide, the authors are troubled at the idea of the United Nations charging journalists as a result of their work. If the United States wins the "war against terrorism," would Afghani journalists be charged with war crimes? If the United States ever lost a war, would U.S. journalists be charged with war crimes? This could have a chilling effect upon freedom of expression. Just ask Pakistani journalists, who were recently arrested and charged with "blasphemy" for recent articles about the conflict with Muslims and Jews because they "included derogatory references to Islam's Prophet Muhammad" (Cooper, 2001, p. 1).

Also, some political scientists have argued that since "media manipulation often plays a central role in promoting nationalist and ethnic conflict … promoting unconditional freedom of public debate in newly democratizing societies is, in many circumstances, likely to make the problem worse" (Snyder & Ballentine, 1996, pp. 5-6)

The authors urge journalists, ethicists, and other researchers to vigorously explore the ethical implications of covering conflict. A free, honest, civil, technologically adept, and otherwise professional press could help to rid the world of conflicts like genocide. Lives could be saved. Media ethicists and journalists need to ask whether that is a goal worth achieving. If it is, then a path needs to be cleared for how best to achieve that goal.

Works Cited or Consulted

Arno, A. (1984). The news media as third parties in national and international conflict: Doubus litigantibus tertius gaudet. In A. Arno & W. Dissanayake (Eds.) *The news media in national and international conflict.* (pp. 229-238). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Ball-Rokeach, S.J., & DeFleur, M.L. (1976). A dependency model of mass media effects. *Communication Research.* 3, 3-21.

Baukus, R.A. (1999). In M.S. Meander (Ed.) *Framing Friction: Media and social conflict.* (pp. 89-124). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Berry, W.E., Braman, S., Christians, C., Guback, T.G., Helle, S.J., Liebovich, L.W., et al. (1995). *Last rights: Revisiting* Four theories of the press. J.C. Nerone (Ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Campbell, K.B. (2000, August). Resolving public conflict: Civic journalism and civil society. Paper presented to Civic Journalism Interest Group at the annual meeting of Association of Educators of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Chalk, F. (1999). Hate radio in Rwanda. In H. Adelman & A. Suhrke (Eds.) *The path of a genocide: the Rwanda crisis from Uganda to Zaire.* (pp. 93-107). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Cooper, A. (2001, January 31). Letter to Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Retrieved from http://www.cpj.org/protests/01ltrs/Pakistan31jan01pl.html on March 22, 2002.

Davison, W.P. (1974). Mass communication and conflict resolution: the role of the information media in the advancement of international understanding. In *Praeger Special Studies in International Politics and Government Series*. New York: Praeger.

DeFleur, M.L., & Ball-Rokeach, S.J. (1989). *Theories of Mass Communication* (5th Ed.). New York: Longman.

Demers, D.K. (1998). Structural pluralism, corporate newspaper structure, and news source perceptions: Another test of the editorial vigor hypothesis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 75 (3, Autumn), 572-592.

Drake, L.E., & Donohue, W.A. (1996) Communicative framing theory in conflict resolution. *Communication Research*. 23(3), 297-322.

Entman, R.M., & Rojecki, A. (1993). Freezing out the public: Elite and media framing of the U.S. anti-nuclear movement. *Political Communication*. 10, 155-173.

Gourevitch, P. (1998). *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Harry, J.C. (2001). Covering conflict: A structural-pluralist analysis of how a small-town and a big-city newspaper reported an environmental controversy. *J&MC Quarterly*. 78(3), 419-436.

Keane, F. (1995). *Season of blood: A Rwandan journey*. New York: Viking.

Kellow, C.L., & Steeves, H.L. (1998). The role of radio in the Rwandan genocide. *Journal of Communication*. 48(3), 107-128.

Livingston, S., & Eachus, T. (1999). Rwanda: U.S. policy and television coverage. In H. Adelman & A. Suhrke (Eds.) *The path of a genocide: The Rwanda crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. (pp. 209-228). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

McQuail, D., & Windhal, S. (1993). *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication* (2nd Ed.). New York: Longman.

Meander, M.S. (Ed.) (1999). *Framing Friction: Media and social conflict.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Metzl, J.F. (1997). Rwandan genocide and the international law of radio jamming. *American Journal of International Law.* 91(4), 628-651. Retrieved from http://links.jstor.org on March 22, 2002.

Mowlana, H. (1984). Communication, world order, and the human potential: Toward an ethical framework. In A. Arno & W. Dissanayake (Eds.) *The news media in national and international conflict*. (pp. 27-35). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Myers, G., Klak, T., & Koehl, T. (1996). The inscription of difference: News coverage of the conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia. *Political geography.* 15(1), 21-47.

Nyankanzi, E.L. (1998). *Genocide: Rwanda and Burundi.* Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books.

Ozgunes, N., & Terzis, G. (2000). Constraints and remedies for journalists reporting national conflict: the case of Greece and Turkey. *Journalism Studies.* 1(3), 405-426.

Patterson, T.E. (1997). The news media: An effective political actor? *Political Communication*. 14, 445-455.

Patterson, P., & Wilkins, L. (2002). *Media ethics: Issues and cases.* (4th Ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Perse, E.M. (2001). *Media effects and society*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Prunier, G. (1995). *The Rwanda crisis: History of a genocide.* New York: Columbia University Press.

The Prosecutor v. Jean Bosco Barayagwiza. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Case No. ICTR-97-19. Retrieved from www.ictr.org on March 28, 2002. (2000).

The Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Case No. ICTR-97-27. Retrieved from www.ictr.org/wcw/ictr/indictments/nahimana.txt on March 19, 2002. (2000).

The Prosecutor v. Hassan Ngeze. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Case No. ICTR-97-32-I. Retrieved from www.ictr.org on March 28, 2002. (2000).

The Prosecutor v. Georges Ruggiu. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Case No. ICTR-97-32-I. Retrieved from www.ictr.org on March 28, 2002. (2000).

Rubin, J.Z, Pruitt, D.G, & Kim, S.H. (1994). *Social conflict: escalation, stalemate, and settlement*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Mc-Graw Hill.

Scherrer, C.P. (2002). *Genocide and crisis in central Africa: Conflict roots, mass violence, and regional war*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Seib, P. (2002). *The global journalist: News and conscience in a world of conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Seib, P. (Ed.). (2001, October 4). *New wars, new media: Covering armed conflict since the Gulf War*. Proceedings from the Lucius W. Nieman Symposium 2001, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

Semetko, H.A., & Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*. 50(2), 93-100.

Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Snyder, J., & Ballentine, K. (1996). Nationalism and the marketplace of ideas. *International Security*. 21(2), 5-40. Retrieved from http://links.jstor.org on March 22, 2002.

Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., & Olien, C.N. (1980). *Community conflict and the press*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., & Olien, C.N. (1999). Community conflict and citizen knowledge. In M.S. Meander (Ed.) *Framing Friction: Media and social conflict*. (pp. 29-57). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Vincent, R.C. (1998). The "troubles" as portrayed in four Irish newspapers. *Gazette*. 59(6), 495-519.

Vincent, R.C. (2000). A narrative analysis of U.S. press coverage of Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs in Kosovo. *European Journal of Communication*. 15(3), 321-344.

Walker, J.R. (1990). Time out: Viewing gratifications and reactions to the 1987 NFL players' strike. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 34(3, Summer), 335-250.

Wall, M.A. (1997). A "pernicious new strain of the old Nazi virus' and an 'orgy of tribal slaughter": a comparison of U.S. news magazine coverage of the crises in Bosnia and Rwanda. *Gazette*. 59(6), 411-428.

Wanta, W., & Hu, Y. (1993). The agenda-setting effects of international news coverage: An examination of differing news frames. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* . 5(3), 250-264.

Wanta, W., & Demaske, C. (1996, May). Religion, media use and support for anti-gay rights measures: an examination of the second level of agenda-setting. Paper presented to Mass Communication Division of the annual convention of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA.

Young, O.R. (1968). *The politics of force*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC
Educational Resources Information Center

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (1/2003)